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HISTORY of WAR

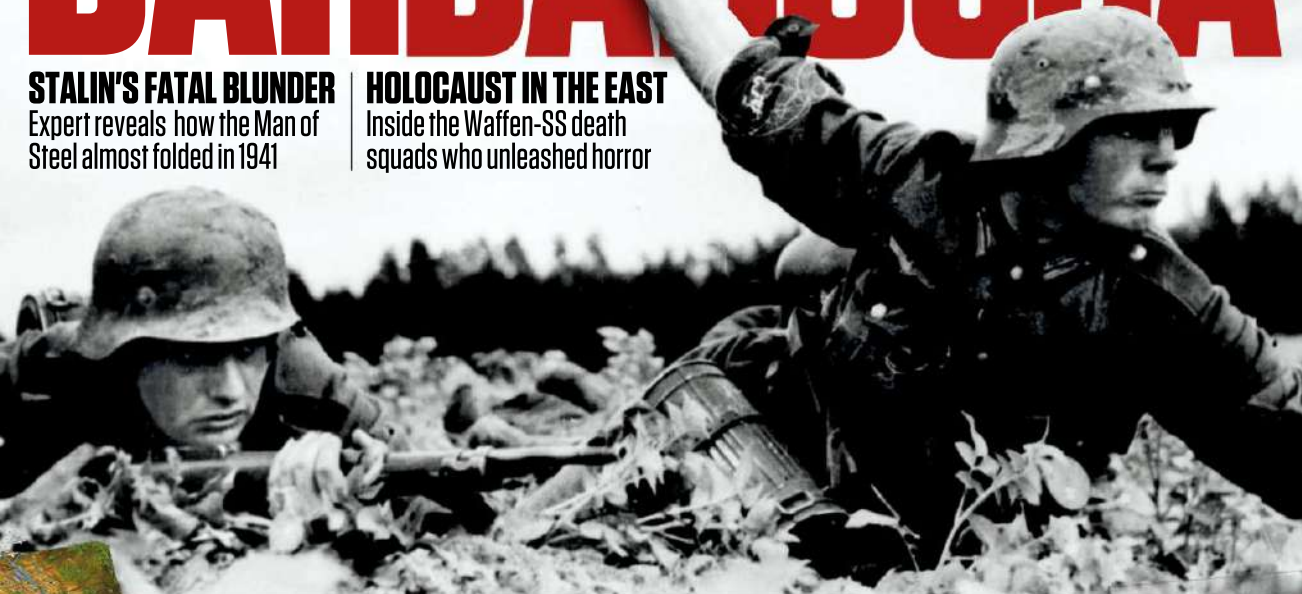
3 PARA VETERAN ON MOUNT LONGDON

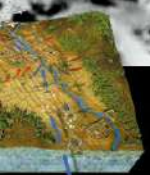
22 JUNE 1941

OPERATION BARBAROSSA

STALIN'S FATAL BLUNDER
Expert reveals how the Man of Steel almost folded in 1941

HOLOCAUST IN THE EAST
Inside the Waffen-SS death squads who unleashed horror





DIEN BIEN PHU
French paratroopers' against-the-odds Vietnam battle, 1954

FUTURE
ISSUE 095

'FLYING TANK'
Inside the Soviet Ilyushin Il-2 Shturmovik

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Above: German soldiers attack a Soviet position with a flamethrower during Operation Barbarossa in 1941

Welcome

When reading the history of Operation Barbarossa, it's impossible not to be overwhelmed by the sheer scale and numbers involved. Over three million Axis soldiers, across 1,800 miles, took part in what many consider to be the monumental turning point in the Second World War. Of course, it also heralded the most terrible crimes the world has seen. In the 80th year since the Nazi invasion began, we look at not only the events on the frontline but also the horrors that unfolded as a result. They are a sobering reminder that behind the numbers and stats are people who lived and suffered through truly world-changing events, never to be repeated.

Tim Williamson
Editor-in-Chief

CONTRIBUTORS

DAVID REYNOLDS

David Reynolds is Professor Emeritus of International History at Cambridge, and a Fellow of the British Academy. Starting on page 28, he spoke with History of War about Stalin's disastrous response to the 1941 invasion and how it almost lost him the war.

STUART HADAWAY

RAF researcher Stuart is back to take a look inside another iconic aircraft for our Operator's Handbook. This issue he turns his attention to the Ilyushin Il-2 – a hardy ground-attack aircraft known to the Red Army as the 'Flying Tank' (page 62)

MICHAEL HASKEW

In this month's Great Battles feature (page 42) Mike recounts the against-the-odds Battle of Dien Bien Phu, 1954. This encounter saw French paratroopers up against a vast number of Viet Minh revolutionaries.

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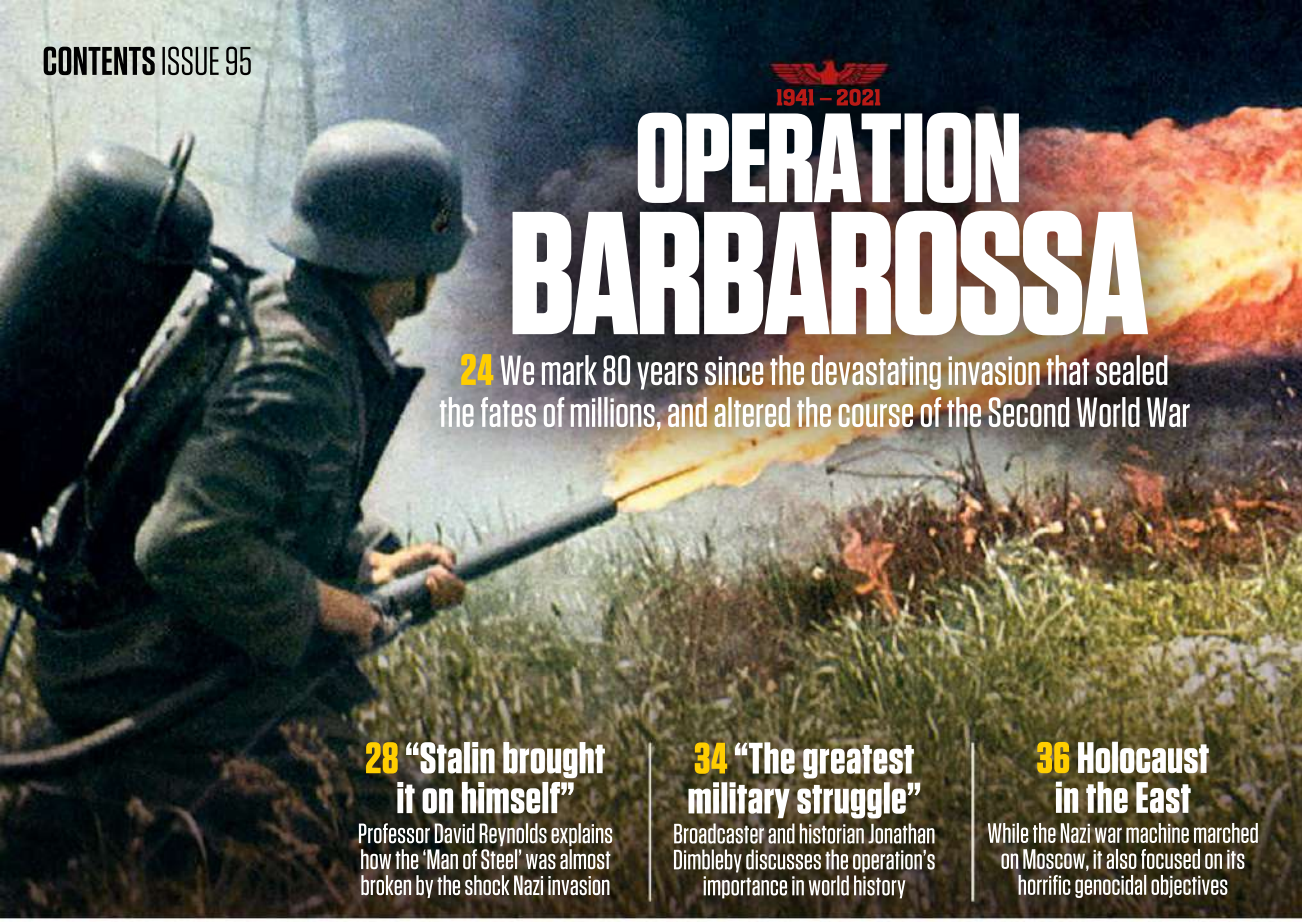
TURN TO PAGE 50



1941 – 2021

OPERATION BARBAROSSA

24 We mark 80 years since the devastating invasion that sealed the fates of millions, and altered the course of the Second World War

28 "Stalin brought it on himself"
Professor David Reynolds explains how the 'Man of Steel' was almost broken by the shock Nazi invasion

34 "The greatest military struggle"
Broadcaster and historian Jonathan Dimbleby discusses the operation's importance in world history

36 Holocaust in the East
While the Nazi war machine marched on Moscow, it also focused on its horrific genocidal objectives

Frontline

GRECO-PERSIAN WARS

12 Timeline
The Persian empire looks to gain dominance in the Mediterranean by taking on the rival Greek city-states

16 Leaders & commanders
Soldiers and rulers on both sides became legends during the long and bloody conflict

18 Battle of Plataea
This climactic battle during the second Perisan invasion saw a Greek coalition repel Xerxes I's forces

20 Did Xerxes really win?
Though historians argue the Persians were triumphant over the Greeks, their victory was perhaps hollow

22 The Greek trireme
This ancient ship design was pivotal in many of the Mediterranean's most important conflicts

GREAT BATTLES

42 In 1954, French paratroopers made a desperate last stand against the Viet Minh

OPERATOR'S HANDBOOK

62 This Soviet ground-attack aircraft became known by the Red Army as the 'Flying Tank'

06 **WAR IN FOCUS**
Stunning imagery from throughout history

24 **OPERATION BARBAROSSA**
Eighty years ago the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union, with devastating consequences for the world

GREAT BATTLES
42 **DIEN BIEN PHU, 1954**
A French garrison stands its ground against a large army of Viet Minh revolutionaries

HEROES OF THE MEDAL OF HONOR
52 **EDDIE RICKENBACKER**
Read how this racing driver became the most successful US pilot of WWI

56 **SURVIVING MOUNT LONGDON**
3 Para veteran James O'Connell recalls the bloodiest battle of the Falklands War

OPERATOR'S HANDBOOK
62 **ILYUSHIN IL-2**
Inside this prolific ground-attack aircraft nicknamed the 'Flying Tank' by the Red Army

Homefront

OPINION
70 **AMERICA'S LONGEST WARS**
Sergio Miller reflects on the end of the war in Afghanistan

72 **MUSEUMS & EVENTS**
A roundup of the latest exhibitions and collections

74 **WWII IN PHOTOS**
Critical events from this month, 80 years ago

76 **REVIEWS**
The latest military history book and film releases

ARTEFACT OF WAR
82 **YOROI ARMOUR**
A preserved set of 14th century samurai armour

SURVIVING MOUNT LONGDON

56 Veteran and author James O'Connell recounts his first-hand experience of the Falkland War's bloodiest battle

WAR in FOCUS

A PRETTY KITTY

Taken c.1942-45

Royal Australian Air Force airmen gather next to a P-40 Kittyhawk aircraft (the British and Commonwealth designation of the American P-40 Mustang). The men are possibly members of 77 Squadron, RAAF, which operated in the South West Pacific theatre of the Second World War. The squadron was among three hastily assembled to defend against the Japanese in 1942. It took part in the defence of Darwin, in the Northern Territory, and later helped defend the airspace over Milne Bay.

© Army

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WAR in FOCUS

PRAM PATROL

Taken: 1981

A mother pushes her child past a British soldier and a Bobby Sands mural, in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Sands was among a number of Irish Republican prisoners to take part in hunger strikes in March 1981, in protest at their treatment by the British government. Sands was elected a Member of Parliament for Fermanagh and South Tyrone during a by-election in April. He was the first of ten prisoners to die as a result of the hunger strike – his death sparked protests and unrest across Northern Ireland and his funeral was attended by over 100,000 people.

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WAR in FOCUS

AN UNHOLY BARRAGE

Taken: October, 1973

Israeli artillery batteries open fire on Syrian positions during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. The short but bloody conflict saw Israel attacked by an Arab coalition led by Syria and Egypt. While Egypt launched its offensive across the Suez Canal, to retake the Sinai peninsula that it had ceded during the Six Day War (1967), Syrian tanks attacked across the Golan Heights. Though both made initial gains, the IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) eventually launched successful counter-attacks. The fighting took place across the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur, and also the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

TIMELINE OF THE...

GRECO-PERSIAN WARS

The Persian Achaemenid Empire twice invades the Greek city states in a series of wars that decides the course of Western civilisation

IONIAN REVOLT

Greek regions revolt against Persian rule – most notably in Ionia but also with related uprisings in Aeolis, Caris, Doris and Cyprus. The Persians crush the revolts but they're the first major conflict between Greece and Persia. The Ionian Revolt represents the beginning of the Greco-Persian Wars.

The city of Sardis is burned during the Ionian Revolt

547 BCE — **499-493 BCE** — **494 BCE** — **492-490 BCE**

PERSIAN CONQUEST OF IONIA 01

Cyrus the Great of Persia conquers the Greek-inhabited region of Ionia in what is now western Turkey. Regional Persian tyrants are appointed to rule conquered Greek territories, which fuels local resentments, particularly in Ionia.

The ruins of the theatre in the ancient Ionian city of Priene

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BATTLE OF LADE 02

The Persians win the decisive battle of the Ionian Revolt at sea. The Ionians lose 246 out of their 353 ships, while the Persians lose 57 vessels. The Greek city of Miletus is then besieged and sacked and the Ionians never recover from their defeat.

A Greek depiction of a ship bearing Ulysses and the Sirens on a stamnos jar dating from c.480-470 BCE

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FIRST PERSIAN INVASION OF GREECE

Darius the Great of Persia orders two campaigns to invade Greece. The aim is to punish the city-states of Athens and Eretria for supporting the Ionian Revolt and also to expand the Persian Empire westwards.

This section of a Greek red-figure vase depicts the War Council of Darius the Great preparing for the invasion of Greece

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BATTLE OF MARATHON 04

10,000-11,000 Athenian and Plataean troops decisively defeat numerically superior Persian forces on a coastal plain. Marathon ends the first Persian invasion as well as perceptions of Persia's invincibility. The battle also begins a 'Golden Age' for Athens, with Classical Greece fostering Western culture.

American author Isaac Asimov wrote that Marathon's significance creates a "peak" of Greek civilisation "whose fruits we moderns have inherited"

BATTLE OF THERMOPYLAE 05

Xerxes marches through Thrace and Macedon to Thessaly, but his advance is stopped by a small Greek force led by Leonidas I of Sparta. Leonidas and 1,400 soldiers (including 300 Spartans) make a legendary last stand at Thermopylae that buys time for a Greek fleet to assemble.

Left: *Leonidas at Thermopylae is an 1814 painting by Jacques-Louis David that combines historical and legendary elements in his depiction of the battle*

490 BCE — **August-September 490 BCE** — **480-479 BCE** — **20 August or 8-10 September 480 BCE**

SIEGE OF ERETRIA 03

A Persian naval task force sails across the Aegean Sea to attack Eretria on the Greek island of Euboea. A six-day siege ensues before the city is betrayed to the Persians by local noblemen. Eretria is sacked and the population is enslaved.

Eretria is first mentioned by Homer in the Iliad as one of the Greek cities that sends ships to the Trojan War. It is also a prosperous trading city

SECOND PERSIAN INVASION OF GREECE

Darius's son and heir King Xerxes I gathers a huge Persian land and naval force to invade and subjugate Greece once again. Athens and Sparta lead other Greek city-states in resistance.

Xerxes I is the fourth 'King of Kings' of the Persian Achaemenid Empire whose many titles include 'Great King' and 'King of Countries'

7 August or 8-10 September 480 BCE

480-479 BCE

BATTLE OF ARTEMISIUM 06

A series of naval clashes occur between Greek and Persian fleets at the same time as the Battle of Thermopylae. The Greek fleets block the Persian advance at the Straits of Artemisium and fighting results in equal losses. However, the Greeks withdraw to Salamis after hearing the news of Thermopylae.

***Right:** This monument to the Battle of Salamis represents the same fighting spirit that is seen at Artemisium*

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DESTRUCTION OF ATHENS 07

The population of Athens is evacuated to the island of Salamis after Thermopylae. The city is twice destroyed by the Persians in two phases. The first destruction is ordered by Xerxes in 480 BCE while the second is conducted by his subordinate commander Mardonius.

So many Athenian sculptures are damaged during the city's destruction that recovered items are dubbed Perserschutt ('Persian rubble') by archaeologists

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BATTLE OF SALAMIS 08

The Greek city-states win a decisive naval victory against the Persians despite being numerically outnumbered. The Persians lose approximately 200 ships against 40 Greek vessels, with Xerxes returning to Asia with much of his army.

A stylised depiction of Salamis in an 1858 painting by German artist Wilhelm von Kaulbach

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BATTLE OF MYCALE 10

The Greeks move into the eastern Aegean Sea and attack strategic Persian bases. This includes a significant victory at Mycale, which forces the Persians to abandon control of Macedon, Thrace and the Hellespont (Dardanelles) Strait.

The ruins of Priene with Mount Mycale in the background

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THE GREEKS COUNTERATTACK

After repelling Xerxes' invasion, the Greek city-states go on the offensive against Persia. There are Greek revolts in Asia Minor and campaigns in Sestos and Cyprus. A Greek fleet besieges and captures Byzantium (modern Istanbul), which allows them mercantile access to the Black Sea.

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This small terracotta warrior figurine from Ancient Cyprus is shown riding a bottle-shaped chariot

September 480 BCE – August 479 BCE

27 August 479 BCE

479-478 BCE – 477-449 BCE

BATTLE OF PLATAEA 09

The largest battle of the Second Persian Invasion of Greece takes place at Plataea. Persian commander Mardonius is defeated and killed by the Greek city-states and his army is destroyed.

Greek hoplites and Persian warriors clash at Plataea

WARS OF THE DELIAN LEAGUE

Athenian statesman Pericles leads the Delian League of Greek city-states in a series of campaigns against Xerxes. The wars turn into a strategic stalemate that results in an alleged treaty called the Peace of Callias. This agreed compromise over territory reputedly ends the Greco-Persian Wars.

The Roman ruins of the ancient city of Salamis, Cyprus. This is the location of the last battle of the Wars of the Delian League

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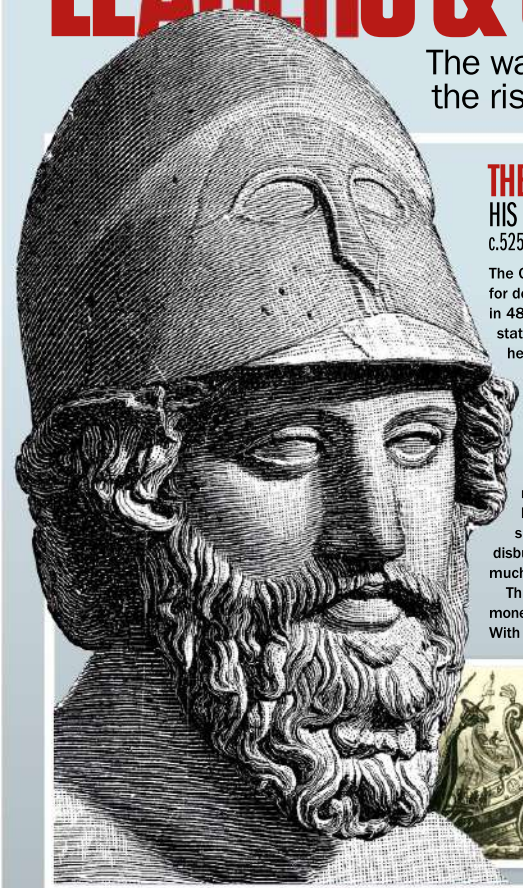
LEADERS & COMMANDERS

The wars of the Greeks and Persians saw the rise of towering figures on both sides



THEMISTOCLES OF ATHENS

HIS FIRM BELIEF IN NAVAL POWER SAVED GREEK FREEDOM

c.525 – 459 BCE **ATHENS**

The Greek who was the most responsible for defeating the second Persian invasion in 480 BCE was Themistocles of the city-state of Athens. As an archon of Athens, he foresaw that the Persian threat had only receded following the Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE, and had not disappeared entirely.

In 483 BCE A new vein of silver was discovered at the Laurium mines. Knowing that Athens would need a powerful navy for its defence, he persuaded his fellow citizens to spend this new income, not as individual disbursements, but on expensive (but much-needed) trireme warships.

This was a not inconsiderable amount of money, about 600,000 drachmae in value. With it, Athens built 200 triremes, and so Themistocles ensured that the city had the ships it would need when a tremendous Persian fleet threatened Greece in 480 BCE.

Themistocles was the general in charge of the Athenian naval force at the Battle of Salamis that year. The leaders of the other Greek contingents wanted to depart Attica, fortify the Isthmus of Corinth and fight a land battle there. Themistocles convinced them to stay and fight at sea by threatening to withdraw the whole of Athens' support (the city had been abandoned when the Persians neared) leaving them on their own, without Athenian aid.

In the battle itself, Themistocles managed to lure the Persian fleet into following the Greeks into the tight straits at Salamis. He thereby negated the enemy's huge numerical advantage.

The formidable triremes played a crucial role in the Greek victory over the Persian fleet

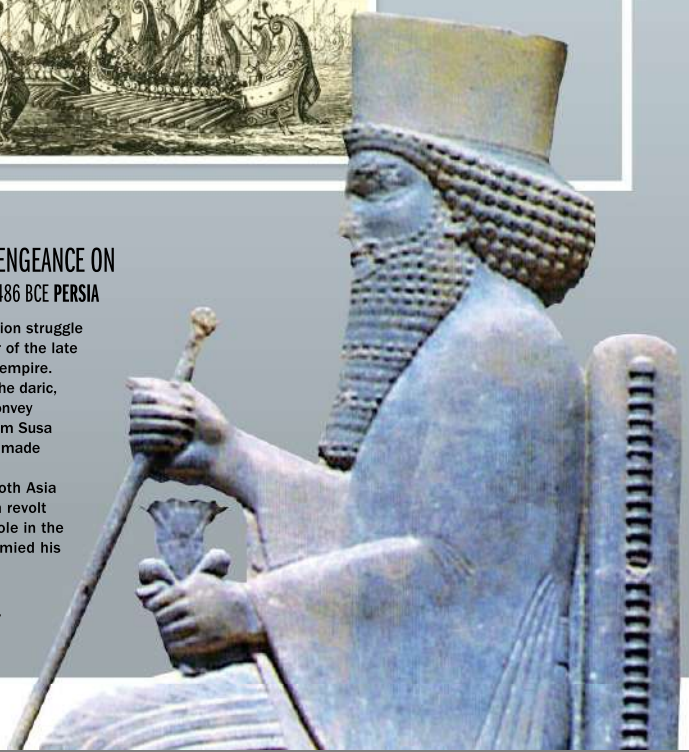
DARIUS I

KNOWN AS 'THE GREAT', HIS DETERMINATION TO EXACT VENGEANCE ON ATHENS SET THE GRECO-PERSIAN WARS IN MOTION 521 – 486 BCE **PERSIA**

Darius I, Great King of Persia, came to power after a murky succession struggle with one 'Gaumata', alleged to be an impostor posing as the brother of the late king. Darius's early reign was beset by a number of uprisings in the empire.

His achievements as king were many. He established a gold coin, the daric, as a universal currency. A horse-riding mail service was founded to convey messages across the empire. The royal road, a highway stretching from Susa in western Iran to Sardis in western Asia Minor, a length of 2,700km, made communications and travel easier and quicker.

Darius conducted military campaigns against the Scythians in both Asia and Europe. His armies also made gains in India and suppressed a revolt in Egypt. Darius swore vengeance against the Athenians for their role in the burning of Sardis. Defeat at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE stymied his quest for revenge.



***Right:** Darius I was furious at the Athenians for their part in the burning of Sardis, and swore revenge against them*

LEONIDAS OF SPARTA

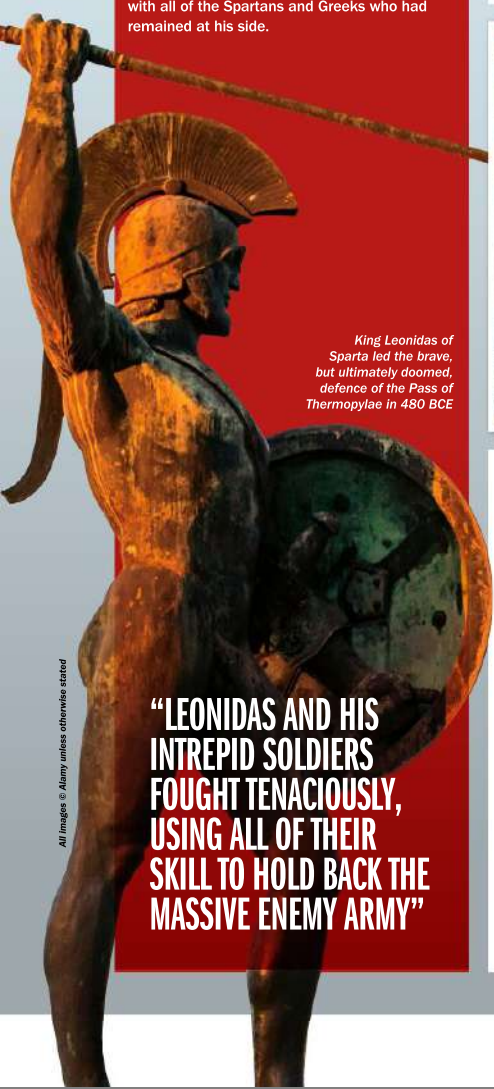
THE KING GAINED IMMORTAL FAME FOR HIS STAND AT THERMOPYLAE

c.540 – 480 BCE **SPARTA**

In 480 BCE, Leonidas, one of the two kings of Sparta, led a vanguard force of just 300 Spartans to defend the strategic pass at Thermopylae against the Persian host. Together with 7,000 hoplites drawn from elsewhere in Greece, Leonidas and his intrepid soldiers fought tenaciously, using all of their skill to hold back the massive enemy army.

However, after two days of determined defence, Leonidas's position in the narrow pass was fatally compromised when a Greek traitor revealed a mountain track to the Persians, allowing them to get behind the Greek line.

Seeing the end had come, Leonidas sent away all of the other Greeks, apart from his Spartans and a few others, who fought on. Leonidas was killed the next day, together with all of the Spartans and Greeks who had remained at his side.



King Leonidas of Sparta led the brave, but ultimately doomed, defence of the Pass of Thermopylae in 480 BCE

"LEONIDAS AND HIS INTREPID SOLDIERS FOUGHT TENACIOUSLY, USING ALL OF THEIR SKILL TO HOLD BACK THE MASSIVE ENEMY ARMY"

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ARTEMISIA

THE QUEEN OF HALICARNASSUS IN CARIA WAS A PROMINENT COUNSELLOR TO KING XERXES OF PERSIA

r.484 – 460 BCE **HALICARNASSUS (PERSIAN EMPIRE)**

One of the most remarkable figures on either side of the Greco-Persian Wars was Artemisia, the queen of Halicarnassus. Standing out from Xerxes' other vassals on account of her gender, she counselled that he should not allow his fleet to go after the Greeks in the confined waters of the Salamis strait, but her wise words went unheeded.

Artemisia took part personally in the Battle of Salamis (480 BCE) and was again a standout. The battle had become a free-for-all, and her ship was being pursued by an Athenian trireme. She found herself boxed in, with no means of getting away. Thinking quickly and ruthlessly, she deliberately rammed another Persian ship, sinking it. Seeing her do this, the Athenian ship assumed that she was on the same side, and moved off to find another target.

Queen Artemisia of Halicarnassus launches arrows at the Greeks at the Battle of Salamis, 480 BCE

© Getty

XERXES

THE SON OF DARIUS TOOK UP HIS FATHER'S UNFINISHED TASK OF PUNISHING THE ATHENIANS

r. 486 – 465 BCE **PERSIA**

Xerxes was the son of the prior Great King, Darius I. Ruling from 486 to 465 BCE, his early years as monarch were troubled, with an uprising in Egypt requiring his attention. It fell to Xerxes to resume the punitive expedition against the Athenians following his father's death. The army he mustered was said to be enormous, but its size was likely much smaller, perhaps around 100,000 troops.

In 480 BCE, the abandoned city of Athens was burned by Xerxes' men after the defeat of the Spartan-led force at Thermopylae. Following the defeat of his fleet at the Battle of Salamis that same year, Xerxes left for home, leaving the continuation of the war to his general, Mardonius.

Xerxes, here stood behind his father, Darius I, ordered a second invasion of Greece that saw Athens burned in 480 BCE

MILTIADES

THIS GENERAL WAS THE GUIDING FORCE BEHIND ATHENS' SUCCESSFUL STAND AGAINST THE FIRST PERSIAN INVASION

c. 550 – 489 BCE **ATHENS**

The aristocrat Miltiades convinced the Athenians that instead of waiting in their city for the Persians to come to them they should have their army meet the seaborne enemy at their landing spot. Some 10,000 citizen hoplites departed Athens and confronted the Persian host before they could get off the beach.

Miltiades was not the supreme commander of the Athenian force, but was one of its generals at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE. Severely outnumbered, the Athenians preferred to wait for help from Sparta to arrive. However, when intelligence came that the Persian cavalry had been put back aboard ship to head for a strike on Athens, Miltiades urged the other generals to attack the Persians. Once they had agreed, Miltiades sent the army, its line purposely thinned to equal the longer Persian line in length, against the enemy. The result was a great victory for the Athenians.

Miltiades then had the tired hoplites hurry home to protect Athens itself, and the Persians were dissuaded from making a landing when they saw the Athenian hoplites standing in formation on the beach.

Helmet of Miltiades from the Battle of Marathon

BATTLE OF PLATAEA 479 BCE

This huge, drawn-out engagement saw a Greek army finally eject the might of the Persian Empire from mainland Greece

The battles of Thermopylae and Salamis are the most famous engagements of the Second Persian Invasion of Greece. Nevertheless, the Battle of Plataea was also important in helping to secure the independence of the Greek city-states from Persian domination.

Thermopylae and Salamis both occurred in 480 BCE and the major Persian defeat at the latter battle left King Xerxes I disheartened. He returned back to his territories in the Achaemenid Empire but left a large army behind in Greece under the command of his brother-in-law Mardonius. This force was based in the region of Thessaly, with Mardonius receiving orders to continue campaigning the following year.

Mardonius initially offered a negotiated peace settlement with the Athenians. The terms included an autonomous Athens within the Persian Empire as well as the reconstruction of the city, which had been destroyed by Xerxes's soldiers. Mardonius's offer was supported by the Greek king of Macedon but the Athenians couldn't accept Persian rule. This refusal forced Sparta to remain allied with the Athenians and Mardonius began to march south through Greece.

In the summer of 479 BCE, the Persians once again occupied Athens and the Athenians pleaded with Sparta for help. The Spartans vacillated but then sent an army commanded by Pausanias. Mardonius was alarmed and retreated from Athens to Boeotia, where the Persians positioned themselves along the River Asopos near the city of Plataea. This position was fortified for miles and included a square wooden stockade that was itself 1.5km long. It was designed to be used as a defence for the Persians if the coming battle turned against them.

Meanwhile, Pausanias's Spartan army was swelled by Athenians and other Greek contingents. The historian Herodotus places the total Greek numbers at 108,200 troops. This was an extremely large army for the Greeks and included 38,700 of the famous citizen-soldier hoplites. Ten-thousand of these were Spartan, 8,000 were Athenian, along with 19 other contingents from across Greece.

Herodotus also claimed that the Persian force was more than twice the size of their opponents at 300,000, with an additional 50,000 Greek allies. The troop numbers for both sides were probably exaggerated but the net result of all these soldiers was the largest land engagement of the war.

A long battle

Pausanias's troops positioned themselves on hills near the Persian camp, although both sides hesitated to attack. Mardonius began the battle by sending the Persian cavalry to disrupt the

Greek hoplites fight Persian warriors at Plataea

Greek supply routes. This tactic worked and the Greeks became disorganised, but the Persian cavalry commander was killed. This forced the Persian horsemen to return to their main position while Pausanias moved away from the hills and nearer to the Asopos. His manoeuvre caused arguments among the Greeks while Mardonius moved his troops in response.

The two armies faced each other across the Asopos in a tense stalemate for almost two weeks, with action being limited to manoeuvring and a few raids. Pausanias eventually decided to move his forces nearer to Plataea but his plan led to more arguments, particularly between the Spartans and Athenians. Mardonius believed the Greeks were retreating and gave an order to pursue them. Pausanias stood his ground, with the Spartans forming a defensive position before a general Greek assault was launched.

Both sides initially fought well but the Greeks' heavier armour worked in their favour. Mardonius was in the thick of the fighting leading an elite unit of 1,000 men, but he was killed by a Spartan. This was a major turning point of the battle, with the Persians fleeing to their original fortified position. Pro-Persian Greeks in Mardonius's army began retreating, with the majority largely being allowed to escape.

The surrounded Persians who remained behind their wooden stockade defences were not so lucky. The Spartans led the attack but it was the Athenians who broke through the defences and a huge slaughter of the Persians ensued. Ancient sources disagree on casualty figures but the huge Persian force was effectively annihilated.

Plataea was fought on the same day as another large Persian defeat at Mycale and these two Greek victories ended the Persian threat to mainland Greece and its city-states. Campaigns were subsequently now fought in the Aegean Sea, Asia Minor and outlying regions. However, despite Platea's importance in ejecting the Persians from Greece the battle never became as famous as the earlier Greek victories of Marathon or Salamis.

A detail of the south frieze of the Temple of Athena Nike, which is said to represent the fighting at Plataea

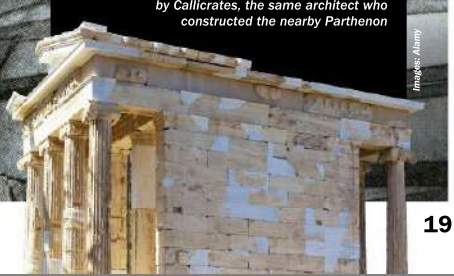
PEARL OF THE ACROPOLIS

THE TEMPLE OF ATHENA NIKE IN ATHENS WAS BUILT TO COMMEMORATE THE GREEK VICTORIES AGAINST THE PERSIANS AND POSSIBLY CONTAINS A DEPICTION OF THE BATTLE OF PLATAEA

The Temple of Athena Nike is a temple on the Acropolis of Athens and is dedicated to the Ancient Greek goddesses Athena and Nike. Sometimes known as the Pearl of the Acropolis, the temple is the smallest on the Acropolis and was built around 420 BCE. It replaced an earlier temple that was destroyed during the Second Persian Invasion of Greece and can be viewed as a kind of war memorial.

In Greek mythology, Athena was the goddess of wisdom, handicraft and warfare, while Nike was the goddess of victory. Combining the two made sense for an Athens that had emerged victorious from the ashes of war. Most intriguingly, the south frieze of the temple may depict the Battle of Plataea.

It depicts a battle between Greeks and Persians, with warriors using shields and spears fighting on foot and horseback. Much of the frieze is damaged but it is believed that it depicts either the Battle of Marathon or Plataea. If it is the latter, one scene that shows a fight over a downed horseman could well be depicting a clash over the body of Masistius, the Persian cavalry commander whose death at Plataea severely affected the morale of his comrades.



The Temple of Athena Nike is built from white Pentelic marble and was designed by Callicrates, the same architect who constructed the nearby Parthenon

Images: Alamy

DID XERXES REALLY WIN?

Though some historians argue that the Persians succeeded by punishing Athens in 480 BCE, they allowed a deeper problem to go unresolved, with terrible consequences

The victorious conclusion of the Greco-Persian Wars brought much pride to the Greeks, and Western history has remembered them as triumphs of the Greek people over tyrannical invaders. However, there is an alternative to this narrative: the Persians actually accomplished their task. Could this be the case? Could the Persians be said to have won the Greco-Persian Wars, contrary to the conventional understanding? It must be borne in mind that the two Persian invasions of the Greek mainland were actually punitive expeditions. The great wars memorialised by Herodotus in his *Histories* came about as the result of a Greek atrocity in Asia Minor years before the Persians invaded Greece.

In what became known as the Ionian Revolt, the Ionian Greeks of western Asia Minor had risen against their Persian overlords in 499 BCE. In one early event, the city of Sardis, the capital of the Persian satrapy of the province of Lydia, was burned, along with the sacred Temple of Cybele. Though one might argue for ultimate justness of the Ionian bid for freedom, the burning of Sardis could not go unpunished. The events subsequent to the firing of the city must be considered with this in mind.

After a short period of moderate Ionian success, the Persian military proceeded to crush the rebellious states, and Ionia had been brought to heel by 493 BCE. Though the Ionians had been smothered, there remained the matter of the Athenians, resident in mainland Greece, who had incautiously come to the aid of the Ionians and had participated in the destruction of Sardis. For their complicity in that atrocity, Darius I, the Great King of the Persian Empire, swore vengeance. So intent was he on obtaining revenge that he tasked a servant to remind him constantly of the Athenians, so that he would never forget his vow.

The first invasion of Greece in 490 BCE was thwarted by the Athenians at Marathon in 490 BCE, and Darius died in 486 BCE, his vengeance unfulfilled. Xerxes, his son, took up the task and invaded Greece again in 480 BCE. Though the Persians were again defeated, at Salamis, Plataea, and Mycale, the Persians did succeed in burning the abandoned city of Athens, along with its Acropolis.

The Athenians had been thereby punished for their role in the burning of Sardis. After the Battle of Salamis in 480 BCE, Queen Artemisia of Halicarnassus, who stood high in Xerxes' esteem, recognised this. She advised him to depart Greece and leave the continuation of the war to his general, Mardonius, explaining that he had already achieved the purpose of his campaign, because he had burned Athens. Further, if Mardonius did in fact succeed in conquering Greece, his success would still belong to Xerxes himself, Artemisia told the king, because Mardonius was his subject. If he failed, however, Xerxes nonetheless would be safe and secure back home in Asia.

The Greek historian Herodotus believed that Xerxes had also come to conquer Greece altogether, in addition to taking revenge against Athens, and make it a part of the Persian Empire. Xerxes had in fact despatched heralds to the Greek city-states in 481 BCE (with the exceptions of Athens and Sparta) to demand earth and water as tokens of their submission to him. This goal can't be ignored, and in this regard, Xerxes surely failed. Whatever the complete set of Persian war aims were, it is undeniable that Athens had been punished. The case can thus be made that Xerxes' mission had been accomplished, to one degree or another.

However, even if this is accepted, the Persians may be thought to have lost the Greco-Persian Wars in a more fundamental, and perhaps more devastating way. The outcomes of the major land battles should have been deeply worrying to the Great Kings. No matter what gloss might be put upon them, the Greek hoplite had amply demonstrated his superiority over the infantry of the Persian Empire. While, for reasons of their own geography, the Persians preferred to field light troops, especially archers, along with fast-moving cavalry, there can be no doubt that in a stand-up brawl, fighting at close quarters, their footsoldiers were no match for hoplites.

Persian monarchs failed to heed fully the warnings from the battlefield, and were content to recruit Greek heavy infantry into their armies over many subsequent decades, testament to their recognition of the hoplites' high quality. Hoplites were the best soldiers that money could hire, and the Persians had lots of it.

The Great Kings would intervene repeatedly in Greek affairs to bring about peace to the warring city-states so that, once the demand there for soldiers had plummeted, those men would be available for recruitment for their own armies. Persia would surely have been better off developing its own native, heavy infantry version of the hoplites. The failure to do so would have serious ramifications a century-and-a-half later, when the Macedonians under Alexander the Great invaded the Persian Empire.

If the Greek hoplite army of the fifth century BCE wanted for anything tactically, it was battlefield support in the form of light missile troops and cavalry. These elements would be added eventually to the hoplites, most successfully by the Macedonians. With pike-armed phalangites, the lineal descendants of the hoplites, at its core, Alexander's combined-arms force smashed Persian army after Persian army, and the empire fell to him within a few short years.

© Getty

The heavily armoured Greek hoplite had no real equal in the Persian army

A Greek hoplite is locked in combat with a Persian warrior

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THE GREEK TRIREME

The trireme was a sleek, fast war galley. Equipped with a bronze ram, propelled by oarsmen and guided by a skilled helmsman, it was a war-winning weapon against the invading Persians

The trireme war galley was a marvel of nautical engineering. About 36 metres long and around six metres wide, it displaced roughly 41 tons of water. When rowed by a trained crew in good conditions it was capable of attaining speeds near the ten knot mark for short periods. A sustained 'cruising' speed of a bit above seven knots over longer trips was also possible.

A trireme was powered by its corps of 170 oarsmen. The warship was rowed by men sitting at three separate levels, with one man per oar. There were three distinct categories of oarsmen: in the uppermost part of the ship were the 62 thranite rowers, right below them were 54 zygian oarsmen and in the lowest part were the 54 thalamian rowers.

The rest of the crew was made up of officers such as the helmsman (kybernetes), ten marines, four archers and the trierarch acting as the ship's captain. This brought the trireme's total complement to 200 men.

The favoured construction material for the trireme was fir (elate), which was preferred because it was light and so made for a faster ship. Pine (peuke) was also used, but was less effective because it was heavier and so resulted in a slower craft. In ancient times, Mediterranean shipwrights used the shell-first construction method (as opposed to frame-first) in which the hull of the vessel was built first. At the bottom of the hull was the keel – the hull planks were added to this, set edge to edge, resulting in a smooth, efficient external surface to the trireme.

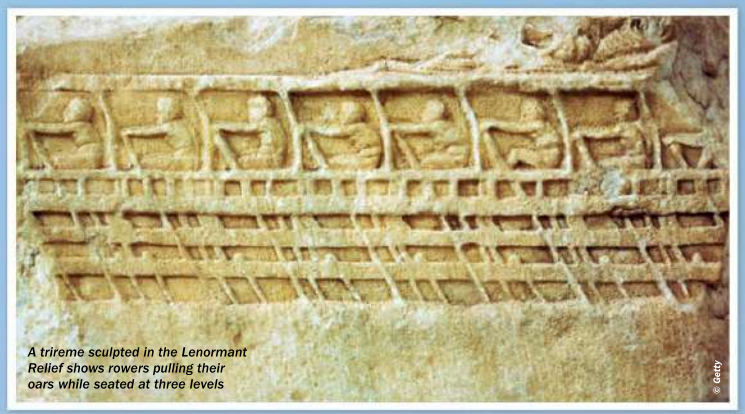
Each plank was joined to its neighbour by the mortise and tenon technique of joinery. The mortise was a small cavity cut in the edge of a plank; a tenon was a thin board that was inserted into the mortise halfway. The other half of the tenon was inserted into

A modern reconstruction of a trireme, named the Olympias, which was officially commissioned into the Hellenic Navy

a corresponding mortise in the neighbouring plank. The tenon was locked in place by pounding hardwood pegs into corresponding holes in the plank and the tenon. This kept the planks from slipping apart. Internal bracing was then added to the fully formed hull.

The wood of the trireme gradually absorbed water and the ships had to be regularly beached (pulled out of the water) to allow them to dry out. Water-logged ships were heavy, slower and less manoeuvrable than a 'drier' ship. When the triremes were drawn out of the water, the crews would typically take their meals. While the vessels were dragged ashore in this way, trireme fleets were very vulnerable to surprise attacks.

There were two primary tactics employed by triremes. A ship could bring itself alongside an enemy trireme and send fighters over to try to seize the other ship in a boarding action. Alternatively, it could attempt to ram an opponent, holing it below the waterline so it would take on water and sink once the ramming trireme had backed away. In actual practice, the dividing line between the two modes of attack was not clear-cut – ships might ram an enemy vessel and then board it.



A trireme sculpted in the Lenormant Relief shows rowers pulling their oars while seated at three levels

© Getty

"THE RAM WAS EQUIPPED WITH FINS TO PREVENT IT PENETRATING TOO FAR INTO THE HULL OF THE ENEMY VESSEL, SO THE ATTACKING TRIREME DIDN'T BECOME STUCK TO ITS VICTIM"

When seeking to ram an opponent, the Greeks had two basic manoeuvres. The first was the 'diekplous', the breakthrough, in which a trireme would row straight through the line of enemy ships, turn about, and ram an opponent's stern. The second was the 'periplous', the envelopment, which saw the trireme try to move around the flank of the enemy line, get behind his ships and then attack a target in its side or stern.

The prow of a trireme was fitted with a sophisticated piece of engineering: a bronze ram that could penetrate through the planking of another ship. Some of these rams have survived from ancient times. One, dating to possibly the third century BCE, was found in the sea near Atlit, Israel, in 1980. The material used in its construction was found to be a high-grade bronze, and the 2.25-metre ram weighed 465kg. Of course, the vessel it had once belonged to had long-since disintegrated to almost nothing.

The ram was equipped with fins to prevent it penetrating too far into the hull of the enemy vessel, so the attacking trireme didn't become stuck to its victim. A high speed was not required for a successful ramming strike, and it's estimated that an impact at an oblique angle would call for a speed of just three to four knots to be effective. A mere forward movement of two to three knots would suffice when hitting an opponent's vessel amidships at a right-angle. It was the mass of the moving trireme that made the ramming manoeuvre such an effective tactic, not the speed of the attack.

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1941 – 2021

OPERATION BARBAROSSA

Eighty years ago the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union shocked the world and began the bloodiest front of the Second World War

In the summer of 1940, most of western Europe was under the boot of a rampant Wehrmacht. Though Hitler's pact with the Soviet Union seemingly remained strong, on 31 July 1940 he described his plans for war with Stalin. "The sooner Russia is crushed, the better," he said. "If we were to start in May 1941, we would have five months to finish the job."

The Nazi leader directed the OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, the high command of the armed forces) to begin planning the invasion, codenamed Barbarossa after the famed Holy Roman Emperor, for 15 May 1941. The operation would see three army groups (North, Centre and South) storming into Soviet territory under the leadership of Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb, Fedor von Bock and Gerd von Rundstedt. Von Leeb's forces were tasked with taking the Baltics and Leningrad; von Bock's men were to head first to Smolensk and then advancing towards Moscow; Rundstedt was ordered to race to secure the 'breadbasket' of Ukraine and the oil-rich Caucasus. Certain of victory, Hitler boasted: "We only have to kick the door in and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down."

In the wake of Stalin's purges in the late 1930s, the Soviet forces were woefully short on both morale and efficiency. To compound this, Stalin insisted on controlling the placement of his divisions, further restricting the Red Army. In April 1941, he was even warned of the Germans' intentions by Winston Churchill. The following month, Richard Sorge, a Soviet spy working in Japan, informed Moscow that Germany was indeed planning to attack. Amazingly, even when Sorge provided a date of 20 June 1941 (just two days off the actual launch date of 22 June), Stalin remained implacable, insisting that Hitler was not "such an idiot" as to risk a war on two fronts. Less than a month after receiving Sorge's report, Stalin would be proven spectacularly wrong.

German troops made rapid gains during the initial stages of Operation Barbarossa, but their success didn't last

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At 3.15am on 22 June, thousands of German aircraft engines burst into life. The Luftwaffe targets were Soviet airfields, destroying stationary fighters before they could even take off. Soon millions of troops were marching across the border. Within two days, many of the 49 German Panzer battalions had penetrated up to 80km into Soviet territory. By 28 June over 400,000 Soviet troops were encircled outside of Minsk as the Second Panzer Group, under General Heinz Guderian, linked up with Hermann Hoth's Third Panzer Group.

To the north, General von Leeb was faring well, his troops hailed as emancipators by some of the violently suppressed peoples of the Baltics. Meanwhile Army Group South, charged with taking Kiev before moving on to the Caucasus, faced determined resistance. Rundstedt was attacking the most heavily defended region, including KV and T-34 tanks, and while the central and northern thrusts of the German army continued to slice into Soviet territory, he found himself increasingly bogged down. Rundstedt's failure to keep up with the rest would ultimately prove fatal for Hitler's hopes of a rapid victory.

By 13 July the Axis armies had advanced between 300km and 600km, claiming over 589,000 Soviets killed or captured. The Wehrmacht was edging ever closer to Moscow, and the First Battle of Smolensk was about to finish with the entrapment of almost 760,000 Soviet troops. On Saturday, 19 July 1941, Hitler issued an order that the Soviet armies trapped around Smolensk (the 16th, 19th and 20th) were to be utterly destroyed before Army Group Centre advanced, not towards Moscow, but south to the outskirts of Kiev to aid Army Group South, which was still 80km outside of the Ukrainian capital.

Though Halder and von Bock were adamant that Moscow should remain their priority, Hitler was unmoved. On 23 August, Army Group Centre swung south. Three weeks later its southern counterpart started to drive north, and on 16 September two more Soviet armies were annihilated as the pincer closed east of Kiev. Stalin's order that the city be held at all costs condemned over 700,000 Soviet troops to encirclement.

Still progressing steadily in the north, forces under the command of von Leeb had sealed off the city of Leningrad eight days prior to the encirclement of Kiev. The city had been a primary objective during the planning of Barbarossa and now its people were to be starved into submission during a siege that would last until January 1944, claiming over 800,000 lives.

After the resistance around Kiev had been removed, Army Group Centre moved once again to Moscow. Stalin gave the defence of the city to General Georgy Zhukov, a formidable figure who had overseen the desperate efforts to counter the Siege of Leningrad. Zhukov wasted little time in putting the men and women of Moscow to work excavating defensive trenches and anti-tank ditches (nearly three million cubic metres of earth was moved by hand). The factories that continued to function (much of the Soviets' industry had been evacuated east) were also turned to military tasks (a clock-maker was asked to begin building mine detonators). If the Germans were to take Moscow, Zhukov was determined they would pay dearly for every street.

"WHILE THE RAIN WAS A FRUSTRATION, THE FREEZING TEMPERATURES THAT FOLLOWED WERE A DEATH SENTENCE"

Codenamed Operation Typhoon, the assault on Moscow began on 2 October 1941. At the outset of the attack the Germans enjoyed a 2:1 superiority in tanks and troops and a 3:1 advantage in aircraft. On 8 October the yearly deluge of weather known as the rasputitsa – meaning the season without roads – began to churn the roads into quagmires. By the end of the month the Wehrmacht was still 80km from its target. Yet while the rain was a frustration, the freezing temperatures that followed were a death sentence.

By 5 December the Germans were forced to halt short of Moscow as the conditions froze both men and machines. The lack of proper winter clothing – a result of Hitler's assurances that the campaign would be over in a matter of weeks – condemned thousands to death.

A German soldier wields a Flammenwerfern during the summer of 1941

© Alamy

BARBAROSSA

22 JUNE – 5 DECEMBER

01 22 JUNE
German Army Groups North Centre and South advance east after sustained attacks from the Luftwaffe on Soviet airfields, taking air superiority to cover the advance.

02 22 JUNE
Two Romanian armies press into Ukraine with the objective of capturing Odessa. Over 650,000 Romanian and Finnish soldiers take part in the initial attack.

03 3 JULY
Volkovysk and then Minsk are taken as German forces encircle the Red Army and take 324,000 prisoners.

04 10 JULY
While the Romanians advance in the south, the Finnish army moves towards the Karelian Isthmus. In total, 300,000 Finnish soldiers joined in the fight against the USSR.

05 16 JULY
Smolensk is taken by the Germans. Resistance lasted in the city until 5 August. By 1 September, the frontline extended as far as Leningrad in the north and Crimea in the south.

06 16 SEPTEMBER
Kiev falls after Soviet troops become trapped in a pocket east of the city. A month later, the Germans reach Bryansk and Belgorod.

07 2 OCTOBER
An all-out assault on Moscow begins. The Germans manage to fight their way to the capital's suburbs but ultimately fail to take the city as winter sets in.

08 16 NOVEMBER
After a lengthy siege, Sevastopol falls to the Axis forces. The capture of Crimea means the Germans can later launch an assault on the oil fields of the Caucasus.

09 5 DECEMBER
Poor weather conditions and Soviet reinforcements take their toll on the Axis invaders. Operation Barbarossa ends having failed to force the Soviet Union to capitulate.

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By the end of WWII, Stalin's propaganda transformation into the leader of an unstoppable Soviet war machine was complete

© Getty

“STALIN BROUGHT BARBAROSSA ON HIMSELF”

WORDS: TOM GARNER

David Reynolds is Professor Emeritus of International History at Cambridge University. Here he discusses how Operation Barbarossa almost broke the Soviet dictator, before he transformed into a world statesman

Professor David Reynolds has made many documentaries for the BBC on 20th century history, including a programme about Stalin called World War Two: 1941 and the Man of Steel

As well as being the largest invasion in history, Operation Barbarossa was also the greatest crisis of Joseph Stalin’s career. A bloodthirsty dictator, Stalin had ruled the Soviet Union with an iron fist since the 1920s. Millions of his own people had already been killed through purges and famine but Barbarossa was a tragedy of titanic proportions. As Soviet forces crumbled in the wake of a relentless onslaught, vast swathes of territory were lost until the Nazis were almost at the gates of Moscow.

Despite the millions of people affected, events were largely dictated by the actions of one man: Stalin. Far from being the mighty autocrat who led a new superpower at the end of the war, his political and military miscalculations during (and even before) June-December 1941 had catastrophic consequences. Professor David Reynolds, an expert in 20th century international history, explains how close Stalin came to losing everything during Operation Barbarossa and how he rebounded from the brink of defeat.

“An epic failure”

Stalin had been ruthlessly consolidating his position as Soviet leader for years by using mass killings to quell dissent during the 1930s, including a purge of the Red Army’s officer corps. The Soviets also signed a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany on 23 August 1939 in the hope of turning Hitler against France and Britain. Reynolds believes that these actions, particularly the latter, had a direct bearing on the calamity that engulfed Soviet forces during the opening stages of Barbarossa.

“It was clear to Soviet military intelligence in the spring of 1941 that there was a massive build-up of Nazi troops in Eastern Europe,” says Reynolds. “Stalin himself had no doubt that the non-aggression pact wouldn’t last in the long-term. He was playing for time but I think he persuaded himself that any breach to the pact would come after a war of nerves, as with Czechoslovakia in 1938 and Poland in 1939.

“What Stalin was not prepared for was an attack without warning. In this rather grey situation he didn’t want to give Hitler any excuse for attacking. He didn’t want any mobilisation or even serious air reconnaissance over German-occupied territory. To paraphrase the late Professor John Erickson, the invasion was not a strategic but a tactical surprise to Stalin. The so-called ‘surprise attack’ was really Stalin managing to surprise himself despite all the warnings from his leading military commanders like Georgy Zhukov.”

During the opening stages of Barbarossa on 22-23 June 1941, Stalin ordered his generals not to mount pre-emptive action. “This reflected his concern not to provoke Hitler until what was happening was absolutely clear, and not rumour or disinformation,” says Reynolds. “It seems that the Soviets had developed a contingency plan for war with Germany, which would have involved some kind of major attack by the Red Army – perhaps later in the summer. However, Stalin’s determination not to provide provocation meant an eighth of the Soviet Air Force, some 1,200 planes, was destroyed on the first morning, mostly on the ground. It was an epic failure on his part.”

“We’ve f****d it up”

The Germans advanced hundreds of miles into Soviet territory. When Minsk fell, the Red Army lost some 420,000 troops, along with huge numbers of tanks and artillery pieces. The road to Moscow was now open and on 28 June Stalin reportedly said in despair: “Lenin founded our state and we’ve f****d it up.” It’s since been speculated that Stalin then had a nervous breakdown, although Reynolds is cautious: “It remains a matter of debate. This was a claim made strongly by Nikita Khrushchev in 1956 as part of his campaign to denigrate Stalin. But other sources suggest that when the magnitude of the offensive became clear, Stalin simply retreated to his dacha at the end of June to take stock.”

Stalin's personal retreat was a critical moment for his leadership. “His key advisors could not get a peep out of him,” reveals Reynolds. “One of the stories is that in the end they went into the dacha to talk to him. The way he looked up when they arrived in the room gave the impression that he thought they were going to say: ‘You've totally screwed up and it's time to go.’ What they actually said was: ‘Comrade Stalin, we need you to take full control of the military.’

“Some said that maybe he was play-acting to smoke out any serious opposition to him. This is a murky area but it's clear that Stalin was totally shocked by what had happened and by his obvious responsibility. It took him a while to regroup. Whether it was a nervous breakdown or something less traumatic is unclear, but he didn't speak to the Soviet people until 3 July 1941. There was a palpable policy vacuum in those early days when the Red Army was surrendering in thousands because of the rapid German advance.”

Once Stalin's authority had been confirmed, he bounced back – helped by olive branch gestures from unlikely sources. “Churchill gave a radio speech on 22 June making it clear that any enemy of Hitler was a friend of Britain,” says Reynolds. “The prime minister didn't repent anything he had said in the past about the horrors of Bolshevism, but for the moment Soviet communism seemed a lesser evil than Nazi Germany.

“CHURCHILL GAVE A RADIO SPEECH MAKING IT CLEAR THAT ANY ENEMY OF HITLER WAS A FRIEND OF BRITAIN”

“Equally positive was the leader of international capitalism, Franklin Roosevelt, sending his right-hand man Harry Hopkins to Moscow at the end of July. He was there to find out what the Soviets' chances were and to offer substantial aid. This included an extension of the Lend-Lease programme, which had benefitted Britain since March 1941. This support from two leading capitalist countries was a surprise, and it bolstered Stalin's position.”

On 16 August 1941, Stalin's reasserted authoritarianism was made clear when he issued Order No. 270 to the Red Army. “He received many reports that soldiers, once surrounded by German pincer attacks, surrendered in large numbers,” says Reynolds. “Order 270 was intended to put some backbone into the army – particularly its officers. There were dire penalties for surrendering and especially deserting. This included the shooting of deserters and the suspension of benefits for their families. That was as significant a deterrent for the soldiers as the threat of punishment for themselves.”

Order 270 was reflective not just of Stalin's cruelty but also his culpability for the Red Army's condition: “There was a real brutal side to the Stalinist defence of the Soviet Union which you have to put alongside the evidence of immense heroism and patriotism by many Soviet troops. Certainly in 1941 the size of the surrenders was one of the things that most shook Stalin. He had not appreciated how bad morale was, though of course that was another thing for which he was partly responsible, particularly with his purges of the officer corps during the 1930s.”

Defending Moscow

By October, Nazi forces were within 100 miles of Moscow. Barbarossa reached its climax with the battle for the Russian capital. Reynolds describes the tense situation: “The German advance seemed inexorable and there was a breakdown of civil order in Moscow. By mid-October the population was in total panic, and the Soviet inner circle seriously discussed whether the government should evacuate the city. Foreign embassies were moved several hundred miles east and Stalin had a special train made ready for the possibility that he might go as well.”

The train never left Moscow. “On 19 October Stalin made a clear decision that he would stay. That was hugely important because, if

German soldiers attack a bunker with flamethrowers during Operation Barbarossa

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The destruction of over 1,000 Soviet aircraft at the beginning of Operation Barbarossa was a direct result of Stalin's initial decision to not attack the Nazi invaders

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Stalin was most shaken by the mass surrender of Soviet troops such as these soldiers after the Battle of Minsk

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THE KREMLIN LETTERS

David Reynolds discusses his book which uncovers the written relationship between Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt from Operation Barbarossa and beyond

A joint project between Professors David Reynolds and Vladimir Pechatnov, *The Kremlin Letters: Stalin's Wartime Correspondence with Churchill and Roosevelt* documents the hundreds of messages that were exchanged between the 'Big Three' Allied leaders during WWII. Based on a decade's work in British, American and Russian archives, *The Kremlin Letters* illuminates how this often uneasy alliance managed to succeed during 1941-45. The book includes astonishing material dating from the period of Operation Barbarossa. Here, Reynolds reveals how Stalin's desperation during 1941 led to him making impossible demands but also how he slowly learned the art of diplomacy.

What was the inspiration behind the book?
Vladimir Pechatnov suggested about ten years ago that Stalin's papers were being placed in the official Russian archives. He thought it would be interesting and important to put them together with material in the US and British archives, thereby bringing all three sides of the story together to give a fuller sense of the Allied war effort and of the personalities of the leaders.

This alliance in 1941-5 mattered enormously to 20th century history. However, Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin only met together in person for the conferences at Tehran and Yalta – a couple of weeks in all. Otherwise, they communicated by telegrams and letters, building up relationships indirectly. These messages, and the surrounding debates in each capital, reveal how these three leaders understood (or misunderstood) each other as they tried to read between the lines.

What do Stalin's communications reveal about his relationships with Churchill and Roosevelt?
This was a man who had done very little diplomacy before 1941. Stalin was not cosmopolitan by background, or well-travelled, so he had to, in a sense, learn diplomacy. Initially he did it pretty crudely, but he gradually grew into a consummate practitioner. Crucially, and unlike Roosevelt or Churchill, Stalin understood the power of silence. His letters are terse, to the point and there were periods where he simply didn't reply. This is partly because he was genuinely preoccupied with the front, but he also liked to keep his allies on the wrong foot. They were never quite certain of what he was thinking.

What can we glean of Stalin's personality from his communication with Churchill on 3 September 1941?
It's a remarkable message, written at a point when the German advance towards Moscow was gathering pace. Stalin tells Churchill, in effect, that 'the only way to deal with this crisis is for you to open a second front this year'. He suggests landing 30-40 divisions somewhere in the Balkans or France, opening a new front to divert German forces.

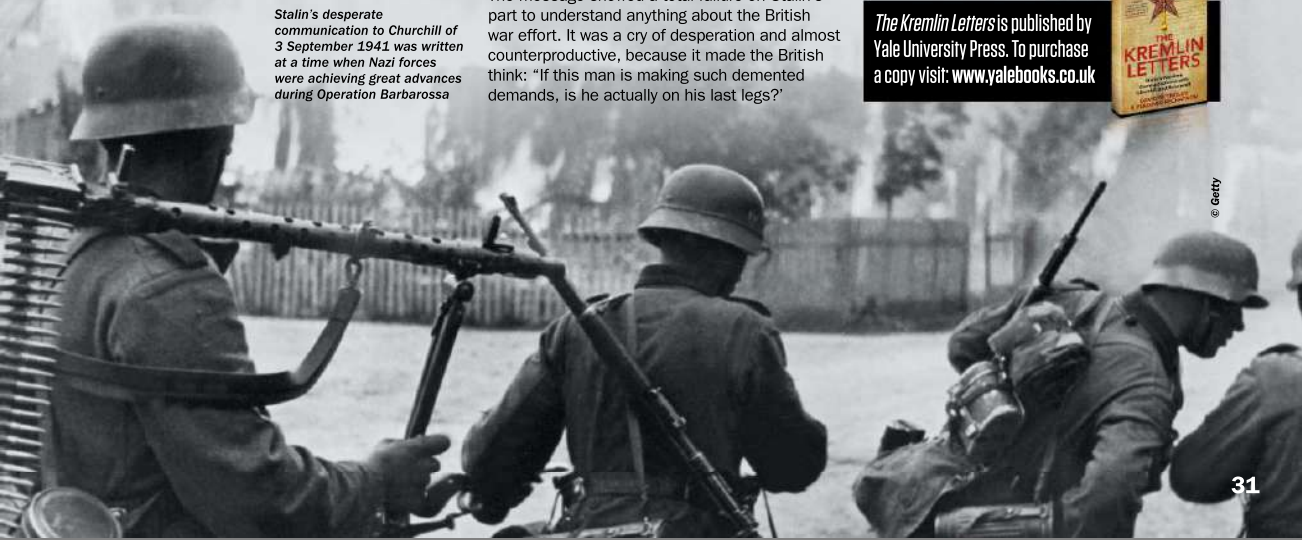
This message was received in London with incredulity. Churchill hadn't got 30-40 combat-ready divisions in the whole of the British Army. Stalin also said he wanted 500 tanks a month but the British were not producing that number for themselves. Most basic of all, Stalin didn't appreciate that opening a second front was a vast undertaking. Crossing the English Channel was not the same as crossing the Volga River. The message showed a total failure on Stalin's part to understand anything about the British war effort. It was a cry of desperation and almost counterproductive, because it made the British think: "If this man is making such demented demands, is he actually on his last legs?'

***Above:** The Tehran Conference of 28 November – 1 December 1943 was the first time that Joseph Stalin, Franklin D Roosevelt and Winston Churchill personally met together*

Similarly, what do the letters tell us about Churchill and Roosevelt's responses to Stalin during Operation Barbarossa?
Churchill and Roosevelt were clear that help must be offered to the Soviet Union because its survival, even for a few months, would buy time for their own continued rearmament. It was also important for Britain to show that other countries were fighting Hitler at a time when the British Empire was 'alone'. There was a real effort to find hardware that could be sent to the Russians, although Britain hadn't much available. It's particularly remarkable that Roosevelt was offering any aid at all because America was not even at war with Germany. Their collective aim was to show willing but they recognised that, in autumn 1941, resisting Operation Barbarossa was basically down to the Russians.

Additionally, the letters show that Stalin never comprehended why Churchill and Roosevelt could not use his methods to wage war. As a brutal dictator, he had no compunction about launching mass attacks at a huge cost in Soviet lives. But Roosevelt and Churchill were not in a position to go to Congress or Parliament and say: 'We've lost 100,000 men in a suicide landing in France to try to help the Russians.' These were democratic leaders who couldn't adopt the callous attitude to human life that Stalin displayed. This difference in basic human values is a persistent undercurrent throughout *The Kremlin Letters*.

The Kremlin Letters is published by Yale University Press. To purchase a copy visit: **www.yalebooks.co.uk**



Stalin's desperate communication to Churchill of 3 September 1941 was written at a time when Nazi forces were achieving great advances during Operation Barbarossa

the country’s leader had given up the fight for Moscow, then it would have been very difficult to maintain the defence of the city. This was certainly an important moment in the whole question of Russia’s survival.”

Throughout this dire national crisis, it was the Soviet people who directly suffered the consequences of the invasion and of their leader’s failures. Nevertheless, their opinions of Stalin remain difficult to gauge. “What’s clear now about the state of affairs in the Kremlin was not known in the country at large. Nor was our image of him as a mass murderer the one widely held in 1941. There were obviously hundreds of thousands who knew that family members had been killed or sent to the gulags. However, that was not spoken of. And Stalin had developed a strong cult of personality in which he was depicted as an avuncular ‘Father of the People’.

“Such was the sprawling diversity of Soviet society that it needed rigid control at the top. Even doubting Stalin’s capacity would create a kind of power vacuum. This idea that Russia could only be run by a strong, merciless leader is a conviction shared by the tsars, by Stalin and, of course, Vladimir Putin today.”

“THROUGHOUT THIS EXTREME NATIONAL CRISIS IT WAS THE SOVIET PEOPLE WHO DIRECTLY SUFFERED THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE INVASION AND THEIR LEADER’S DECISIONS”

Repeating mistakes

The German offensive against Moscow ultimately failed. Stalin’s non-aggression pact with Japan remained intact, which allowed him to move dozens of divisions from Siberia to launch a powerful counter-offensive in early December 1941, driving the Germans back several hundred miles. Soviet victory spelled the end of Operation Barbarossa.

Nevertheless, Reynolds considers that Stalin’s belated successes made him overconfident: “The survival of Moscow was a close-run thing, but the counteroffensive pushed the Germans several hundred miles back in considerable disarray. There’s no doubt that it went to Stalin’s head. He now believed that because the Germans had failed to reach Moscow, they were soon going to completely collapse. Over the next few months, he spent a great deal of time haggling with the British and the Americans not just about military aid but about who would get what territory at a peace conference, which he seems to have expected during 1942.

“However, when the Soviets attacked again in spring 1942 the Germans resisted vigorously and started to push the Red Army back. There was renewed panic and more mass surrenders; from May 1942 Stalin faced a replay of Barbarossa, but with a big difference. Hitler shifted his

Nazi forces move through a snowy, smoke-filled landscape during the Battle of Moscow

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Left: Soviet soldiers operate an anti-aircraft gun to defend Moscow against German air raids

Below: German tank and grenadier soldiers conduct a briefing during the Battle of Moscow

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attention from Moscow to the Ukraine, Stalingrad and the Caucasus oil supplies. The Soviet people had to endure a second year of appalling suffering.”

“The mantle of history”

Reynolds believes that the miseries and mistakes of 1942 indicate that Stalin learned little from Operation Barbarossa. “There were clear indications in the early months of Barbarossa of the Wehrmacht’s potency and capacity for rapid movement,” he says. “Also, the Germans encouraged initiative by junior officers, whereas the Red Army was run by orders. I don’t think Stalin grasped any of that and his paranoia inclined him to assume that if things went wrong then traitors were to blame. It was not until the summer of 1943 that Stalin learned to trust his generals (led by Zhukov) – particularly after the Battle of Kursk.”

Although the Soviet Union came close to losing the war against the Nazis in 1941, Reynolds believes that any defeat would not have been total: “It’s hard to imagine the Soviets losing the war in the same sense that France did in 1940. Russia had vast territory, enormous resources and a climate that was remorselessly unfavourable to attackers, as Napoleon discovered to his cost in 1812. The idea that the Soviet Union would somehow cease to exist is hard to imagine, and it’s not actually what Hitler intended. He wanted to carve out German-controlled territory up to Moscow. This included the Ukraine, which was the bread-basket of the Soviet Union. The real issue of losing would be whether Stalin ended up running a vassal state on the edge of the German Empire.”

On Stalin’s personal role in the calamity of Operation Barbarossa, Reynolds is unequivocal: “He made the predicament of the Soviet Union much worse in 1941 and again in 1942 by his overconfidence, complacency and failure to really understand what was going on at the front.”

Despite those disastrous early mistakes, however, Stalin’s position was strengthened by the Soviet Union’s blood-soaked survival. “You can see this in the changing public image of Stalin,” explains Reynolds. “In 1941-42 he wore ‘party dress’ consisting of a felt jacket and baggy trousers. He looked a bit like a yokel to foreign visitors. But after Stalingrad he started dressing in military uniform as the supremo of the Red Army, taking credit for its victories. Similarly, in Stalin’s Kremlin office, the portraits of Marx, Lenin and other communist ideologues were replaced by those of heroic Russian marshals from the 18th century and the Napoleonic Wars.”

For Reynolds, these changes in the iconography reflect Stalin’s dramatic evolution as a leader since Operation Barbarossa: “He was now wrapping himself in the mantle of history as a leader in a way that he did not do in the first part of the war. That’s testimony to the way he grew from being completely wrong-footed in 1941 to the ‘titanic, all-seeing’ military leader who was finally winning the Great Patriotic War.”

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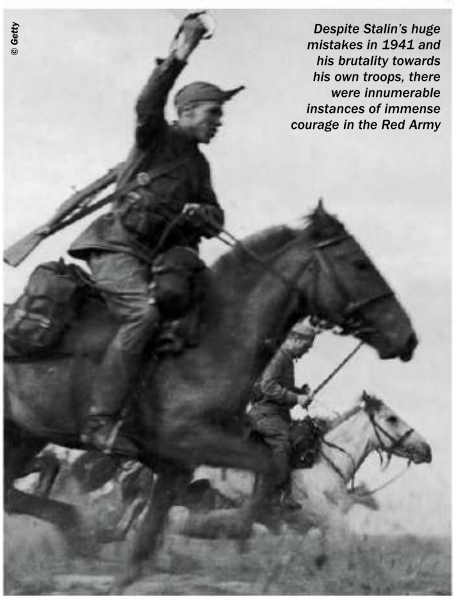
A crossfire attack between Soviet and Nazi forces at night pictured over central Moscow.



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Despite Stalin’s huge mistakes in 1941 and his brutality towards his own troops, there were innumerable instances of immense courage in the Red Army

Two German soldiers pose with a decapitated bust of Stalin outside a house in Smolensk, July 1941

© Getty

"THE GREATEST MILITARY STRUGGLE"

INTERVIEW WITH JONATHAN DIMBLEBY

WORDS: TOM GARNER

Jonathan Dimbleby's previous books on WWII include Destiny in the Desert: The Road to El Alamein and The Battle for the Atlantic

© Oxford University Press / Matt Austin

Ahead of the publication of his new book on Operation Barbarossa, the distinguished broadcaster and historian discusses the campaign and its impact on the 20th century

Operation Barbarossa has received different interpretations from historians over the past eight decades. Although it has been written about many times, Western academics have often focussed on Barbarossa's purely military aspects. Nevertheless, Jonathan Dimbleby has written a new general history that tells the story of the operation in all its vast complexity. A British historian, journalist and filmmaker, Dimbleby reveals the unfathomable brutality that characterised Barbarossa, its consequences for European history and how it's remembered in different countries.

What new direction did you want to take in how to tell the story of the operation?

There have been many books written about Barbarossa but there haven't actually been that many recent histories that have looked at the big picture as well as the battlefield. I was seeking to do something different to reach a wide audience.

I believe that Barbarossa was not only the greatest military struggle of WWII in scale but also the most important. I wanted to draw out how important it was and why Hitler's defeat at the gates of Moscow ensured that he could never beat the Soviet Union. Many in the West, for perfectly understandable reasons, focus on the war on the Western Front but I wanted to illuminate the conflict in the East.

I then particularly wanted to emphasise the horror of the campaign. It was more brutal than any other of WWII, and on a scale of atrocity that beggars belief. 1941 was the also the year that the Holocaust began in earnest. More than one million of the six million Jews who were murdered during WWII were killed during Barbarossa – not in gas chambers but by being shot and thrown into pits.

What shocked or surprised you about Barbarossa while you were writing the book?

What astonished me was the massive scale, which is difficult to exaggerate. You can talk about the massive loss of life in statistical terms but when I read about it in detail it all but overwhelmed me. This included the sheer horror of it and the enormity of Hitler's intentions to establish Lebensraum by destroying the Soviet Union and eliminating the Jews from Europe.

I was also very surprised to learn in the early part of the story the scale of the bad faith in the separate negotiations between Moscow, Berlin and London. They were conducted with the most extraordinary degree of cynicism. In the process, I learned about how the Balkans became the trigger for Hitler's decision to open up the war on two fronts. He realised there was a red line that Moscow was not going to willingly allow him to cross. It's interesting that WWI was also triggered by events in the Balkans and – in some ways – WWII.

What insights did you gain about how Barbarossa unfolded because of the actions of Hitler and the German high command?

On paper, Barbarossa was not only a daunting adventure but foolhardy. This was because of the scale of the operation and Hitler's ambition to attack on three fronts going for Leningrad, Moscow and Kiev. His high command was aware that they were chewing off an enormous amount but Hitler was unassailable. He had taken a huge gamble in the Western Campaign of 1940 but had been successful and was now master of the nation's destiny.

Some of his commanders were in thrall to him and bought the Nazi ideology. Others were dubious but didn't have the will or strength to say, "This is folly" except in their private moments. It was reprehensible moral cowardice.

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"IT WAS MORE BRUTAL THAN ANY OTHER CAMPAIGN OF WWII, AND ON A SCALE OF ATROCITY THAT BEGGARS BELIEF"

At the end of late July 1941 Hitler realised that the Red Army could commit more men into battle and take horrific losses. The advance could not be completed on all three fronts in the expected time. Hitler was then undecided whether he should send his forces south into the Ukraine for the agricultural and industrial heartlands or go to Moscow and destroy the leadership.

The frontline commanders all wanted to go to Moscow but Hitler wrestled with this for over three weeks. It was a devastating delay because it allowed the Russians to re-form with a degree of order. His assumed absolute certainly was actually absolute uncertainty.

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Above: Vladimir Putin pictured with WWII veterans at a Victory Day military parade in Red Square, Moscow, 24 June 2020

Barbarossa is often regarded as an almost exclusive clash between Germany and Russia. To what extent has the role of other nationalities been forgotten?

I think it has. When the Einsatzgruppen killed civilians they were not only supported by Wehrmacht commanders (despite their later denials) but also by Ukrainians, Poles, Latvians, Yugoslavs, Romanians and so on. That pro-Nazi participation was witting: you weren’t forced to do it. People joined death squads and acted as police forces to facilitate executions. There was a willing collaboration that went way beyond the minimal collaboration of an innocent civilian.

Poland is a classic case where a great many people protected as many Jews as they could while keeping their heads down. However, a very significant number participated in and facilitated the murder of Polish Jews. That of course is very difficult to say in Poland today without finding yourself arraigned. It’s not illegal but it is quite close to it.

How important was Barbarossa for the future of 20th century European history?

Military defeat had been inflicted on Hitler by the end of 1941 and there was no way he could prevail at Stalingrad. The tide kept turning and by 1944 the Germans were defeated on the Eastern Front and had been retreating since Kursk. The Soviet Union was bound to defeat them, aided and abetted by Allied support. In 1943, Stalin was already making demands at the Tehran Conference for the future of Eastern Europe, including Poland. The Western Allies knew they were whistling in the wind because he held all the cards. There was no way they could prevent Stalin from occupying Poland.

Elsewhere, D-Day played an important subsidiary role in hastening the downfall of Hitler. However, it actually protected Western Europe from Stalin or some accommodation that Hitler’s successors might have made with the Russians. The ‘Race for Berlin’ was to secure the West because by that time the die had been cast.

The fate of Europe and the contours of the Cold War were therefore created out of the Nazi defeat of 1941. If you don’t have an appreciation of Barbarossa then it’s very difficult to understand Eastern Europe today. All of the fermenting tensions in the Crimea, Ukraine, and so on, were suppressed during WWII and the Cold War but they were there and they’ve re-emerged. We all take our ideological and strategic stances but we don’t take into account how that all happened very often.

How have academic and general perceptions of Barbarossa changed in the West, Germany and Russia over the last 80 years?

Barbarossa was regarded for a long time by Western historians as something of a sideshow – even though it was big – because the focus was on the Western Front. However, there has been a continuing shift in evaluation and I think it should change more, if only to get a more complete picture.

From a German perspective, deniability was initially very important but there’s none of that now. Leading German historians have led the way in pinning responsibility onto their own previous generations. They’ve been at the forefront in exposing the horrors of the Holocaust because of the astonishing degree of material in their archives.

On the Russian side, the ‘Great Patriotic War’ is used with increasing vigour today to defend Vladimir Putin’s excesses. It creates national pride and fuels resentment against the West for failing to recognise that Europe was saved from Hitler by the Soviet Union. It also fuels Putin’s very clever urge to tell the Russian people that while times may be hard in certain ways they still have a vigorous, powerful adversary that they have to protect themselves from. The enemy is always at the gates and Operation Barbarossa and the Great Patriotic War are the most vivid illustrations of that threat.

Soviet soldiers leap over a foxhole, November 1941

Operation Barbarossa. The History of a Cataclysm is published by Oxford University Press.
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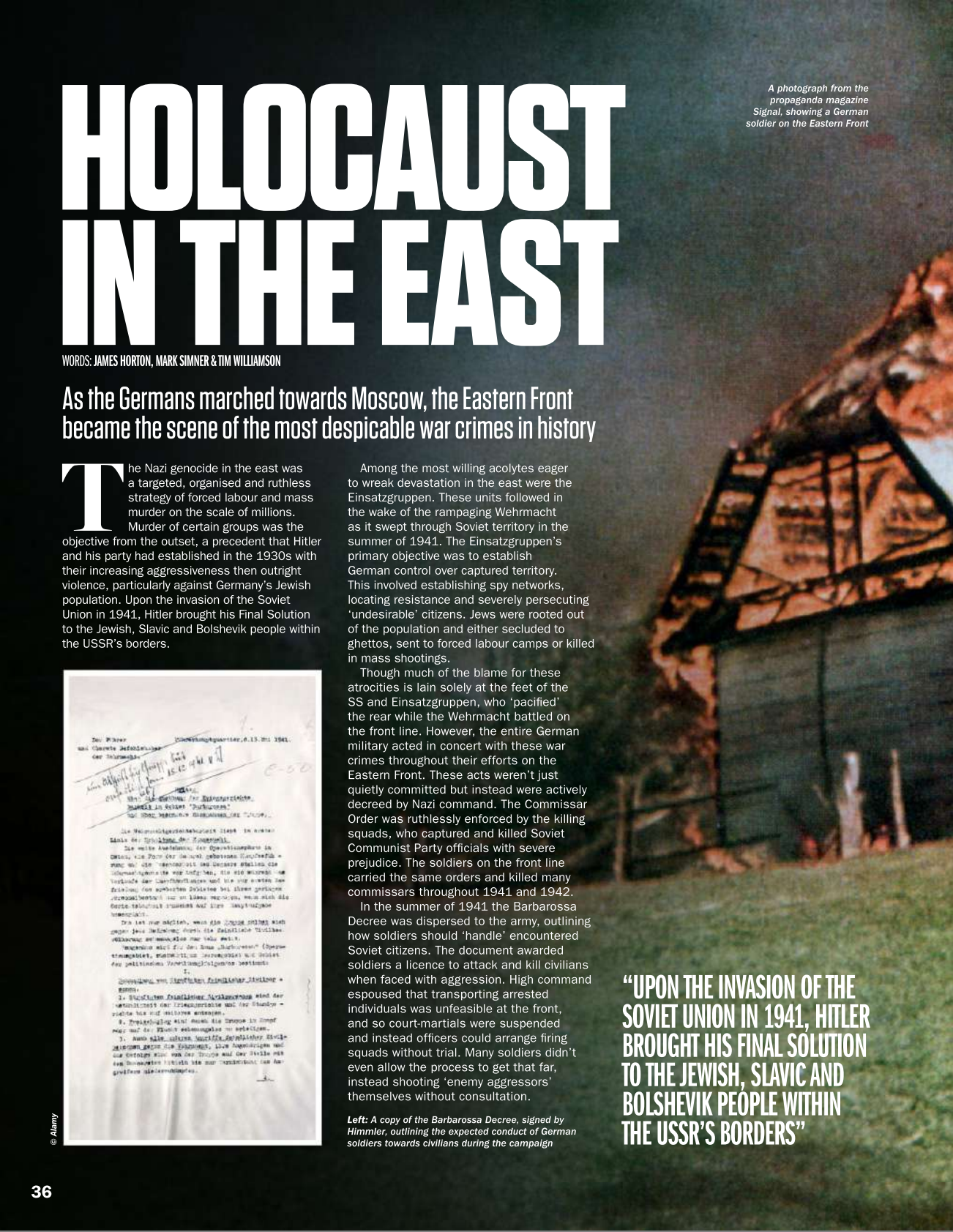
HOLOCAUST IN THE EAST



A photograph from the propaganda magazine Signal, showing a German soldier on the Eastern Front

WORDS: JAMES HORTON, MARK SIMNER & TIM WILLIAMSON

As the Germans marched towards Moscow, the Eastern Front became the scene of the most despicable war crimes in history

The Nazi genocide in the east was a targeted, organised and ruthless strategy of forced labour and mass murder on the scale of millions. Murder of certain groups was the objective from the outset, a precedent that Hitler and his party had established in the 1930s with their increasing aggressiveness then outright violence, particularly against Germany's Jewish population. Upon the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, Hitler brought his Final Solution to the Jewish, Slavic and Bolshevik people within the USSR's borders.

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Among the most willing acolytes eager to wreak devastation in the east were the Einsatzgruppen. These units followed in the wake of the rampaging Wehrmacht as it swept through Soviet territory in the summer of 1941. The Einsatzgruppen's primary objective was to establish German control over captured territory. This involved establishing spy networks, locating resistance and severely persecuting 'undesirable' citizens. Jews were rooted out of the population and either secluded to ghettos, sent to forced labour camps or killed in mass shootings.

Though much of the blame for these atrocities is lain solely at the feet of the SS and Einsatzgruppen, who 'pacified' the rear while the Wehrmacht battled on the front line. However, the entire German military acted in concert with these war crimes throughout their efforts on the Eastern Front. These acts weren't just quietly committed but instead were actively decreed by Nazi command. The Commissar Order was ruthlessly enforced by the killing squads, who captured and killed Soviet Communist Party officials with severe prejudice. The soldiers on the front line carried the same orders and killed many commissars throughout 1941 and 1942.

In the summer of 1941 the Barbarossa Decree was dispersed to the army, outlining how soldiers should 'handle' encountered Soviet citizens. The document awarded soldiers a licence to attack and kill civilians when faced with aggression. High command espoused that transporting arrested individuals was unfeasible at the front, and so court-martials were suspended and instead officers could arrange firing squads without trial. Many soldiers didn't even allow the process to get that far, instead shooting 'enemy aggressors' themselves without consultation.

***Left:** A copy of the Barbarossa Decree, signed by Himmler, outlining the expected conduct of German soldiers towards civilians during the campaign*

"UPON THE INVASION OF THE SOVIET UNION IN 1941, HITLER BROUGHT HIS FINAL SOLUTION TO THE JEWISH, SLAVIC AND BOLSHEVIK PEOPLE WITHIN THE USSR'S BORDERS"

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THE FOLLOWING PAGES CONTAIN PHOTOGRAPHS AND WRITTEN ACCOUNTS OF WAR CRIMES DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR. READER DISCRETION IS ADVISED

EINSATZGRUPPEN

Convicts, sadists and Nazi zealots: these were the men hand-picked to carry out the most heinous crimes in the history of war

In May 1941, recruits for the newly formed Einsatzgruppen, intended for the coming invasion of the Soviet Union, assembled at the police school at Pretzsch on the River Elbe. No specific instructions as to who should be sent to the school had been issued but the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA) looked to the Sicherheitspolizei (Sipo), Geheime Staatspolizei (Gestapo) and Sicherheitsdienst (SD) for likely candidates. Others would be selected from the Kriminalpolizei (Kripo) and many of the enlisted men would be provided by the Waffen-SS. More still came from the Ordnungspolizei (Orpo.)

Those earmarked to command an Einsatzgruppe and their subordinate Einsatzkommandos and Sonderkomandos were chosen personally by Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich. Among these hand-picked Einsatzgruppen leaders were highly educated lawyers, physicians and educators, most of whom had earned doctoral degrees before the war. One, Otto Rasch, had earned two doctoral degrees and was referred to as 'Dr Dr Rasch'.

Training at Pretzsch lasted a mere three weeks, where the men sat through Nazi ideological lectures on honour, duty and the subhuman nature of those they would be

"THE MEN SAT THROUGH NAZI IDEOLOGICAL LECTURES ON HONOUR, DUTY AND THE SUBHUMAN NATURE OF THOSE THEY WOULD BE EXPECTED TO DEAL WITH"

CHAIN OF COMMAND

REINHARD HEYDRICH

Reinhard Heydrich was a leading SS and police official in Nazi Germany, who became one of the chief architects of the Holocaust. He had formed earlier Einsatzgruppen operating in Poland in 1939. These units arrested and executed individuals deemed a threat to the German occupation, including members of the Polish nobility and intelligentsia, nationalists, members of the Catholic clergy, and Jews. Under Heydrich's direction, the Einsatzgruppen murdered 50,000 Poles, including 7,000 Polish Jews.

In 1941 Heydrich was again directed by Himmler to organise Einsatzgruppen to operate in the Soviet Union. Four Einsatzgruppe, made up of 16 Einsatzkommandos and Sonderkomandos, were deployed, and are estimated to have murdered 1.5 million Jews and others. Heydrich was assassinated in June 1942.

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DR FRANZ WALTER STAHLECKER

A Gestapo head and member of the SD, who had previously served in occupied Norway, Franz Stahlecker was promoted to SS-Brigadeführer in early 1941 and appointed to command Einsatzgruppe A. Attached to Army Group North for Operation Barbarossa, he was instructed to carry out operations in the Baltic States. (Einsatzgruppe A consisted of Sonderkommandos 1a and 1b and Einsatzkommandos 2 and 3.) By the end of 1941, Stahlecker reported his Einsatzgruppe had murdered almost 250,000 Jews. He would later be made Higher SS and Police Leader for Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus. Stahlecker was killed by Soviet partisans in March 1942.

Source: Wiki / PD / Gov

ARTHUR NEBE

Former member of the Prussian police and head of the Kripo in Nazi Germany. Nebe commanded Einsatzgruppe B (including Sonderkommandos 7a and 7b and Einsatzkommandos 8 and 9), attached to Army Group Centre and instructed to carry out operations in Belarus. Nebe believed the Einsatzgruppen were overwhelmed by the task assigned to them and experimented with different, more efficient methods of killing that he hoped would prove more humane for the killers (but not their victims). These included the use of explosives and carbon monoxide gas. Nebe was executed in March 1945 for his alleged involvement in the 20 July plot.

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OTTO OHLENDORF

Having joined the SD before the war, Ohlendorf would become head of Amt III (SD-Inland) of the RSHA, with responsibility for intelligence and security within Germany. He was appointed to command Einsatzgruppe D (including Sonderkommandos 10a and 10b and Einsatzkommandos 11a, 11b and 12) attached to 11th Army operating in Bessarabia, Southern Ukraine, Crimea and the Caucasus. It is thought Ohlendorf was responsible for the murder of 90,000 men, women and children, mostly Jews. He was convicted of crimes against humanity after the war and executed in June 1951 at Landsberg Prison in Bavaria.

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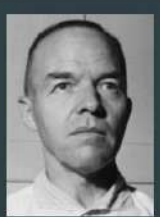
DR. OTTO RASCH

A veteran of World War I, Rasch received two doctorates in law and political economy between the wars and was known as 'Dr Dr Rasch'. He would become a member of the Sipo and SD and served in Poland in 1939, where he oversaw the execution of prisoners arrested by the Einsatzgruppen. Rasch commanded Einsatzgruppe C (consisting of Sonderkommandos 4a and 4b and Einsatzkommandos 5 and 6), attached to Army Group South and operating in Northern and Central Ukraine. He was put on trial after the war, but his case was discontinued on medical grounds. Rasch died while in custody in November 1948.



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expected to deal with. Terrain exercises were carried out, but military training was brief and often restricted to the firing of weapons on a range. Inoculations were also administered. It'd only be near the end of this training that the men learnt they were destined for the Soviet Union, although no doubt many had guessed.

The Einsatzgruppen were organised into four Einsatzgruppe (labelled A to D) with a total of 16 Einsatzkommandos and Sonderkomandos. Strengths of each individual Einsatzgruppe varied but have been estimated as follows: Einsatzgruppe A – 1,000; Einsatzgruppe B – 655; Einsatzgruppe C – 750; and Einsatzgruppe D – 600. Later, following the invasion of the Soviet Union, the Einsatzgruppen would be assisted by locally raised militias and auxiliary police in the occupied territories.

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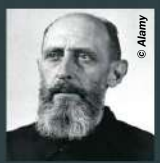
***Right:** Among the most chilling images of the Holocaust in the East shows the execution of civilians in Ukraine*

PAUL BLOBEL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A veteran of World War I and a police officer who joined the SD before the war, Paul Blobel commanded Sonderkommando 4a. His unit, assisted by the Orpo and Ukrainian auxiliary police, carried out the Babi Yar Massacre at Kiev in September 1941, in which 34,000 Jews were murdered. He was sentenced to death by the Nuremberg Military Tribunal after the war and hanged at Landsberg Prison in June 1951.

VIKTORS ARAJS

Although not a member of the Einsatzgruppen, Viktors Arals was the leader of the Arajs Kommando, a unit of Latvian auxiliary police assisting Einsatzgruppe A. Arajs and his men took part in the Rumbula Massacre, carried out in November and December 1941 near Riga, Latvia, in which 25,000 were murdered. He was found guilty of war crimes in December 1979 and died in prison in Kassel in January 1988.

MARTIN SANDBERGER

Source: Wiki / PD / Gov

Sandberger commanded Sonderkommando 1a of Einsatzgruppe A. Upon his arrival in Estonia, he enthusiastically recruited and organised local militias to assist in the destruction of the country's Jews. By mid-October 1941, he chillingly reported to his superiors that: "All male Jews over 16... were executed by the Estonian self-defence units under the supervision of the Sonderkommando." Sandberger was released from prison in 1958 and died in 2010, aged 98.

BRUNO MÜLLER

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Commander of Einsatzkommando 11b of Einsatzgruppe D, Müller previously led an Einsatzkommando during the Polish campaign of 1939, carrying out Sonderaktion Krakau against professors and academics at Jagiellonian University. In 1941 he operated in Crimea, Southern Bessarabia and the Caucasus. Little is known of his activities, but it is said he personally murdered a two-year-old child and its mother as an example of what he expected from his officers and men.

WALTER MATTNER

Mattner was an Austrian SS and police lieutenant attached to Einsatzkommando 8 of Einsatzgruppe B, who took part in a massacre at the Byelorussian city of Mogilev in October 1941. Mattner and his men shot dead over 2,200 men, women and children in cold blood before disposing of their bodies in a nearby forest. He later described the killings in chilling detail in a letter to his wife.

Einsatzgruppen D execution in Ukraine, 1941
© Alamy

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Einsatzgruppen soldiers executing civilians in Ukraine

OSKAR DIRLEWANGER

"A MENTALLY UNSTABLE, VIOLENT FANATIC"

Even compared with many of the worst war criminals among the Waffen-SS, his record stands out as uniquely brutal

The above quote from a police report on Oskar Dirlewanger goes some way to describing a mind of unfathomable cruelty. Before WWII, where he committed many heinous crimes, Dirlewanger was already widely feared within the German military for being unhinged, unpredictable and dangerous.

By the end of the war, Dirlewanger had overseen and personally taken part in the torture, rape and murder of thousands of civilians in Germany, Belarus and Poland, all under the thin guise of eliminating 'bandits' behind the frontline. He waged war almost entirely against an unarmed enemy. While unleashing his feverous hatred against communists and Jews, his choices of victim were indiscriminate and he killed men, women and children with impunity.

A veteran of WWI and an Iron Cross recipient, Dirlewanger didn't take long in finding a new hunting ground for his violent tendencies after Germany's defeat. After the failed military coup of 1920, the Kapp Putsch, a large group of left-wing workers, rose up in the Ruhr region in west Germany, forming the self-proclaimed Red Army of the Ruhr.

As a fanatical nationalist, as well as a student of political science at the time, Dirlewanger threw down his books to join the Freikorps and Reichswehr forces sent to put down the uprising, as well as insurrections in Saxony and Upper Silesia. The defeat of the Red Army of the Ruhr saw regular executions and atrocities on both sides. These bloody internal clashes would prove to be just a taste of the cruelty Dirlewanger would unleash on the world in the next global conflict.

In 1922, Dirlewanger returned to studying and completed his degree. He then found the ideal home for his extreme right-wing and nationalist views in the Nazi Party, which he joined a year later – just a few years after it was formed. By this time he had already been in trouble with the law for possessing a firearm illegally and 'anti-Semitic incitement', but if anything this strengthened rather than harmed his position in the party.

By 1932 Dirlewanger had gained a senior position in the Sturmabteilung (SA), but it wasn't long before his depraved habits were noticed once again by authorities. In 1934 he was convicted of seducing a dependent, reportedly abusing a 14-year-old girl, for which he was sentenced to two years. However, he soon walked free and volunteered to join the German Condor Legion in Spain. This unit famously fought for Franco against the Republican government in the Spanish Civil War. Here was another chapter in Dirlewanger's personal vendetta against the political Left.

After returning to Germany following the Nationalist victory in Spain, Dirlewanger found preparations for the Nazi invasion of Poland under way. Though still under investigation for his earlier criminality, he appealed to Heinrich Himmler personally, begging to be allowed to join the Waffen SS before the invasion began. Thanks in large part to his patron and Waffen-SS Chief of Staff Gottlob Berger, Dirlewanger's request was eventually granted. He was cleared of the charges set against him and was made an Obersturmfuhrer (1st Lieutenant) of the Waffen-SS. In 1940 he was tasked with creating his own unit.

SS-Sonderkommando Dirlewanger was initially formed of convicted poachers, set loose from prison and placed in a security capacity within Occupied Poland. Later, many SS officials would deny that the Dirlewanger battalion was even a part of the Waffen-SS, and that it merely served the military wing – supposedly to create distance from themselves and the sanctioned violence perpetrated. Both Hitler and Himmler saw a twisted logic to press-ganging ex-convicts into policing, bullying and terrorising the populace of their newly conquered lands – utilising the useless dregs of their jails to instil order through fear.

Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-S73495 / Anton Ahrens / CC-BY-SA 3.0

In 1941 the Dirlewanger unit was directly involved in the violent removal of thousands of people from villages around the city of Lublin, Poland, in efforts to make room for ethnic Germans. This area would later serve as the site for a Waffen-SS concentration camp

Often driven by alcohol-fuelled frenzies, Dirlewanger and his men spent the remainder of the war murdering, looting, raping and extorting the civilians on the Eastern Front, all under the guise of 'anti-partisan' activity. The unit also applied their barbarous methods during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, taking part in the Wola District Massacre, between 5-12 August.

By 1945, during the Battle of Berlin, many of the unit had been captured by Soviets, but Dirlewanger himself escaped west to be picked up by the Allies. Reports indicate that he was eventually beaten to death in his cell, likely by his own guards who recognised him. The years following the war saw many figures in the Waffen-SS disown the Dirlewanger unit and its crimes, while many of the former members of the brigade simply vanished back into civilian life.

"OFTEN DRIVEN BY ALCOHOL-FUELLED FRENZIES, DIRLEWANGER AND HIS MEN SPENT THE REMAINDER OF THE WAR MURDERING, LOOTING, RAPING AND EXTORTING THE CIVILIANS ON THE EASTERN FRONT"

Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-R97906 / Schremmer / CC-BY-SA 3.0

Dirlewanger's unit was so barbaric that many in the Waffen-SS denied it was part of the organisation

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AS HE PREPARED FOR HIS FIRST COMBAT PATROL, NOVICE FIGHTER pilot Wolfram von Richthofen was keen to impress his famous cousin, the famed *'Red Baron'* and the flight leader for the mission. Although suffering from fatigue and combat stress, Manfred von Richthofen was the consummate professional and the safety of his fellow airmen was of paramount importance to him. As the Fokker Dr.I fighters of Jasta 11 climbed away from Cappy aerodrome on 21st April 1918, Wolfram had been given strict instructions to stay out of trouble should the formation encounter the enemy, staying on the periphery of the action and experiencing what the melee of a dogfight looked like.

On the other side of the lines on the same morning, rookie Canadian airman Wilfred Reid *'Wop'* May climbed into the cockpit of his Sopwith Camel fighter having received similar instructions from his Flight Commander, ace pilot Captain Roy Brown. On the coming patrol, if the flight encountered the enemy, he was to avoid contact, gain height and having observed the fighting, immediately make for his home aerodrome. For both men, the coming hours would arguably be the most significant in their lives and through their inexperience, would result in the death of the most famous fighter pilot to have ever lived.

Once in the air, both patrols found themselves in the same airspace and a savage dogfight ensued. As instructed, both rookie pilots gained height and stayed on the periphery of the fighting, however, they both found themselves in the same piece of sky. With each pilot consumed by the thrill of combat and thinking they could score an easy first victory against an inexperienced opponent, they started to dogfight, a development which immediately attracted the attention of the Red Baron, who sped to the assistance of his cousin. The inexperienced *'Wop'* May was now fighting for his life, diving for Allied lines, hoping to shake off the ace German pilot who was on his tail, unaware that his attacker was the feared Manfred von Richthofen. Inexplicably, von Richthofen broke his first rule of combat fighting and followed the Sopwith low over enemy lines, where he would pay the ultimate price for his mistake. Having sustained a mortal wound from a single bullet fired from an Australian machine gun position on the Morlancourt Ridge, the Red Baron's reign was over, as his famous red Fokker Dr.I crash landed in a field behind Allied lines, his lifeless body slumped over the controls. Both Wilfred May and Wolfram von Richthofen would survive the encounter and indeed the war, but would forever be linked with the death of the most famous fighter pilot the world had ever known.

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DIEN BIEN PHU, LAI CHAU PROVINCE, NORTHWEST INDOCHINA 13 MARCH TO 7 MAY, 1954

DIEN BIEN PHU

An epic siege by the communist Viet Minh dashed French ambitions to restore their colonial empire in the Far East

WORDS **MICHAEL E HASKEW**

After enduring the devastation of World War II and the occupation of France by Nazi Germany, the post-war French government looked to regain at least a measure of its lost prestige. One way to accomplish the task was to reassert control of its colonial empire, which stretched across the globe but had become largely destabilised in the aftermath of the conflict.

Inevitably, the colonial initiative would require the deployment of French armed forces, and the colony of Indochina in Southeast Asia soon emerged as a hot spot. Early confidence gave way to frustration, disappointment and disaster. Eventually, the French dream of resurgent preeminence in Indochina was shattered at Dien Bien Phu, an otherwise nondescript valley in the northeast of the country, where the European army was humiliated and forced to surrender after a two-month siege masterfully conducted by communist Viet Minh forces.

On 27 October 1946, the constitution of the Fourth Republic authorised the French Union, successor to the nation's former empire. Subsequently, the French reestablished their colonial government in Indochina, which had been occupied by the Japanese in 1941. However, the defeat of Imperial Japan had rekindled a burgeoning nationalism among the peoples of Southeast Asia. In fact, while Indochina was still in Japanese hands, Ho Chi Minh, a young communist revolutionary and ardent nationalist, had emerged as architect and leader of the Viet Minh, a coalition intent on establishing an independent nation.

General Vo Nguyen Giap led Viet Minh forces at Dien Bien Phu, directing the successful 55-day siege

© Alamy

Free from France

Amid the August Revolution of 1945, Ho announced independence from France and the creation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Inspired by their charismatic leader and their fusion of communist and nationalist fervour, the Viet Minh launched a guerrilla war against the French.

Utilising hit-and-run tactics, keeping the French off-balance and refusing to commit substantial forces to a decisive battle, the guerrillas managed to stymie the efforts of a succession of French field commanders to end the insurgency and pacify Indochina. Among the half-dozen French military leaders who had tried via diplomatic or military means and failed were Philippe Leclerc de Hauteclocque and Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, both heroes of the Free French forces during World War II.

Leclerc received little support for a deal he brokered between Ho and French negotiators. Admiral Georges Thierry d'Argenlieu, high commissioner for Indochina, scolded Leclerc: "I am amazed – yes, that is the word, amazed, that France's fine expeditionary corps in Indochina is commanded by officers who would rather negotiate than fight." Leclerc was killed in a plane crash in November 1947.

De Lattre bolstered flagging French morale. His outnumbered command defeated two divisions of Viet Minh, more than 20,000 men, at Vinh Yên in January 1951, and again at Mao Khé in March. He was appointed high commissioner and commander-in-chief of the French Far East Expeditionary Corps that year but lost his only son in the Battle of the Day River in May. Ill health forced him to return to France, and he died of cancer in early 1952. Perhaps the greatest opportunity for French victory in Indochina died with de Lattre – and soon enough the downward spiral to ignominious defeat gained momentum.

Toward Dien Bien Phu

In the spring of 1953, General Henri Navarre was appointed to command French forces in Indochina, replacing General Raoul Salan, who had followed de Lattre. The French perspective on the war had changed, and the

Image: Wiki / PD / Gov

***Above:** Colonel Christian de Castries commanded the French garrison that was defeated at Dien Bien Phu*

Victorious Viet Minh soldiers raise their flag above the former French headquarters at Dien Bien Phu

"PERHAPS THE GREATEST OPPORTUNITY FOR FRENCH VICTORY IN INDOCHINA DIED WITH DE LATTRE – AND SOON ENOUGH THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL TO IGNOMINIOUS DEFEAT GAINED MOMENTUM"

OPPOSING FORCES

VIET MINH

LEADER
General Vo Nguyen Giap

INFANTRY
50,000 revolutionary troops

ARTILLERY
200 guns

VS

FRANCE

LEADER
Colonel Christian de Castries

INFANTRY
16,000 French Army, Foreign Legion, Colonial, & Vietnamese troops

ARMOUR
10 tanks

AIRCRAFT
600 various transport & combat types

© Alamy

Image: Wiki / PD / Gov

Above: *Carrying supplies to their troops besieging the French at Dien Bien Phu, Viet Minh porters performed a vital but backbreaking function*

Image: Wiki / PD / Gov

Above: *Well-armed and equipped Viet Minh soldiers charge a French defensive position at Dien Bien Phu. The communists significantly outnumbered the defenders*

government contemplated the prospect of peace negotiations.

The Viet Minh, however, continued to operate aggressively, establishing supply bases in neighbouring Laos and advancing further into the country. Meanwhile, French commanders had failed to establish clear objectives and lapsed into half-hearted reactionary operations. Navarre considered his limited options to blunt the Viet Minh offensive and wrest the initiative from the communists.

Colonel Louis Berteil, commander of Mobile Group 7 and chief of planning on Navarre's staff, suggested the 'hedgehog' concept. The plan was simple – construct a forward military base in northwest Indochina, in the rear of the Viet Minh thrusts into Laos, and threaten the enemy's thin supply lines. The Viet Minh would be compelled to fall back and at long last be drawn into a decisive battle.

The march of folly?

Peering at a map of Southeast Asia, Navarre chose Dien Bien Phu, in Lai Chau Province, the extreme northwest of Indochina near the frontiers with Laos and China, as the location to establish an air-head. Here airborne troops would be inserted to execute the plan, named Operation Castor. An abandoned airstrip, built there by the Japanese during World War II, would facilitate the initial insertion, as well as the deliveries of reinforcements and supplies as needed.

Still, Dien Bien Phu presented easily identifiable weaknesses. Resupply would, after all, have to take place by air due to distance, enemy resistance on the ground, and dense jungle. The topography offered another significant challenge, which seems

1954
1
5
4
3
01 THE FRENCH ARRIVE
French airborne troops under the command of Colonel Christian de Castries are parachuted or delivered by air to Dien Bien Phu in November 1953. The French hope to threaten Viet Minh lines of supply and communication and force them into a decisive battle.
02 ESTABLISHING THE 'HEDGEHOG'
Although construction materials are woefully inadequate to build defensive positions capable of withstanding heavy artillery fire, the French fortify eight mutually supporting strongpoints at Dien Bien Phu in the valley of the Nam Yum River in the extreme northwest of Indochina. These are named Beatrice, Gabrielle, Anne-Marie, Huguette, Claudine, Dominique, Eliane and Isabelle.
03 THE HARROWING HEIGHTS
While the French neglect to seize the high ground around Dien Bien Phu, Viet Minh commander General Vo Nguyen Giap takes full advantage, establishing heavy artillery positions to bombard the French almost continuously. Eventually, these artillery barrages tip the balance in favour of the besieging communists.
04 THE SIEGE BEGINS
After months of planning and artillery bombardment that had begun in January, General Giap orders the first major ground action of the siege on 13 March 1954. Following seven hours of fighting, strongpoint Beatrice in the north is overrun by communist troops.

05 HEAVY GUNS THUNDER

The Viet Minh wrestle their heavy artillery to the heights surrounding Dien Bien Phu, and the guns are placed in camouflaged positions, obscured from French observers on the valley floor and surrounding hills. The frustrated French are unable to execute effective counter-battery fire, and constant Viet Minh shelling contributes substantially to the eventual communist victory.

06 AIR SUPPLY THWARTED

Dozens of Viet Minh anti-aircraft guns prevent low-level resupply of French forces by air. Pilots are ordered to maintain altitudes of at least 2,000 metres in hopes of avoiding the intense enemy fire. As a result, most airdrops are inaccurate and supplies intended for French soldiers fall into the hands of the communists.

07 DIRECT ASSAULT AND TRENCH WARFARE

The Viet Minh take heavy casualties in direct assaults against the Dien Bien Phu strongpoints; however, their superior numbers steadily erode French combat efficiency. Simultaneously, communist soldiers continually dig trenches closer and closer to French fortifications and utilise sappers to facilitate their attacks.

08 THE SHRINKING PERIMETER

As the Viet Minh take successive strongpoints, the French perimeter contracts to roughly the size of a football stadium. At long last, on 7 May 1954, Dien Bien Phu falls amid relentless communist assaults on the few positions that remain under French control. The victors capture 12,000 prisoners.

Illustration: Nicolas Fonder

to have been dismissed once French soldiers were deployed. The chosen French position in the Nam Yum River Valley, which stretched 16km, was surrounded by high ground, leading General Vo Nguyen Giap, commander of the victorious Viet Minh, to describe Dien Bien Phu as a rice bowl with the French at the bottom and his troops around the rim.

When Navarre unveiled the details of Operation Castor his closest staff officers – to a man – protested. There were obvious weaknesses, and would it actually be possible to maintain combat efficiency with supply by air? Navarre was insistent. He envisioned a success similar to an earlier engagement at the fortified air-head of Na San in late 1952. The Viet Minh had hammered the base with frontal assaults and failed to dislodge the French defenders. Giap, however, had learned his lesson well. Once Operation Castor was set in motion, he realised that the French had 'fixed' themselves. He might well lay siege to their base, batter them with artillery, bring up anti-aircraft guns to interfere with resupply, and bleed them white.

Into the valley

On 20 November 1953, the first elite French airborne forces, 9,000-strong, parachuted or were flown into Dien Bien Phu. Remarkably, their commander, Colonel Christian de Castries, failed to seize the surrounding high ground and instead chose to defend his position with a series of strongpoints constructed along the valley floor and the lower hills.

"PERHAPS THE GREATEST MISCALCULATION OF ALL AMONG THE FRENCH COMMANDERS WAS THEIR UNDERESTIMATION OF VIET MINH RESOLVE"

These strongpoints were named Gabrielle, Beatrice and Anne-Marie to the north; Claudine and Huguette to the west; Dominique and Eliane in the east; and Isabelle to the south. While these names were likely derived from the first letters of the alphabet, a few of de Castries' critics asserted that they were the names of several of his numerous mistresses.

From the outset, defending Dien Bien Phu presented a significant challenge, let alone mounting any offensive raids to interdict Viet Minh supply lines or interrupt their communications. Major André Sudrat, the French chief engineer, was woefully under-equipped to build fortifications stout enough and in quantity to protect French soldiers from communist artillery fire. When he learned that he would receive only 3,300 tons of construction materials and barbed wire for the purpose, he lamented: "In that case, I'll fortify the command post, the signal centre and the X-ray room in the hospital; and let's hope that the Viet has no artillery." This was the epitome of wishful thinking.

Perhaps the greatest miscalculation of all among the French commanders was their underestimation of Viet Minh resolve. Initially, Giap ordered the communist forces in the area of Dien Bien Phu to offer what resistance they could. However, while the French garrison swelled to about 16,000 airborne, Foreign Legion, colonial and loyal Vietnamese troops, the communists, too, were marshalling their forces for the coming battle. Giap patiently amassed five divisions, roughly 50,000 troops at peak strength, and he understood that time was his ally.

Giap also accepted the gift of the high ground and made the most of it. In an incredible feat of logistics, determination and dedication to a cause, Viet Minh fighters and civilian labourers manhandled more than 200 artillery pieces, many of them 105mm howitzers capable of deadly plunging fire, up the dirt trails of the surrounding heights. One Viet Minh fighter remembered a man who flung himself before the wheels of a heavy gun, which had snapped its lines, to prevent it rolling into a nearby ravine. Soviet-made Katyusha multiple rocket launchers were brought in, along with scores of anti-aircraft weapons placed to make the skies

While soldiers already on the ground observe, French paratroopers descend at Dien Bien Phu in November 1953

over Dien Bien Phu hazardous to low-flying French aircraft. The Viet Minh fighters were continually digging, and by the time ground action began in earnest they had excavated 100 kilometres of trenches closer and closer to the northern redoubts.

Finally, when the first Viet Minh artillery shells began to fall on the French air-head in January 1954, the communists outgunned the defenders in heavy weapons four-to-one and had completed their encirclement of Dien Bien Phu.

The curtain rises

Following months of preparation, Giap ordered the first major ground action by the Viet Minh, an effort to capture Beatrice, on 13 March. Preparatory artillery fire was devastating, and a single direct hit killed the commander of the 3rd Battalion, 13th Foreign Legion Demi-Brigade defending Beatrice along with most of his staff.

The French had constructed three defensive positions, and these were assailed by the 141st and 209th Regiments of the Viet Minh 312th Division. The southernmost position, hammered by 75mm mountain guns, was quickly captured; however, the two remaining put up a courageous defence. The attackers became tangled in barbed wire and were raked by flanking fire from French machine guns. After seven hours of bitter fighting, however, Beatrice fell. The last French resistance was extinguished well after dark, and only about 100 French soldiers were able to escape. With 350 dead, wounded or taken prisoner, the French were stunned by the ferocity of the attack. Although the capture of Beatrice had cost Giap 600 killed and 1,200 wounded, communist morale soared.

Colonel Charles Piroth, the French artillery commander, blamed himself for French inability to mount effective counter-battery fire, and he was heard to say: "I am responsible. I am responsible." The following night, Piroth, also regretting his early overconfidence, committed suicide with a hand grenade.

With the fall of Beatrice, the Viet Minh tightened their stranglehold on Dien Bien Phu. Artillery fire blasted gaping holes in the runway, and concentrated anti-aircraft fire virtually shut down the airfield. Parachute supply drops were conducted from high altitudes, out of range of

***Below:** Viet Minh troops haul an artillery piece to the high ground surrounding the French*

Supplied by the United States, a few M24 Chaffee light tanks were employed by the French at Dien Bien Phu

Image: Wiki / PD / Gov

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General Vo Nguyen Giap watches a Viet Minh assault during the siege of Dien Bien Phu in the spring of 1954

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French troops surrender to Viet Minh soldiers after weeks of bitter fighting

© Getty

Intense Viet Minh anti-aircraft fire greatly hampered French air-drops of troops and supplies

© Getty

the communist guns, but were so inaccurate that more supplies fell into the hands of the Viet Minh than the French, whose outlook grew more grim with each passing day.

On the morning of 14 March, Giap turned his attention to Gabrielle. Again, communist artillery fire wreaked havoc, seriously wounding the commander of an elite Algerian battalion that was defending the position and shaking his soldiers. Two regiments of the Viet Minh 308th Division launched repeated assaults, beginning around 8pm. A counterattack by the Vietnamese 5th Parachute Battalion under Colonel Paul Langlais was broken up by artillery fire, and only a few of these troops reached Gabrielle at all. The situation became untenable, and on the morning of 15 March the Algerians abandoned Gabrielle. The Viet Minh suffered up to 2,000 casualties, and French dead and wounded amounted to about 1,000.

The situation steadily worsened as Anne-Marie, garrisoned mainly by ethnic Tai troops, was evacuated on 17 March. Some of the Tai defenders had been compromised by communist propaganda and defected, while others had lost heart after the defeats at Beatrice and Gabrielle. Meanwhile, communist artillery continued to rain down on the defenders of Dien Bien Phu, affording them little respite. Supplies dwindled, and the number of wounded swelled beyond the capacity of medical personnel to provide even rudimentary care.

The noose tightens

Communist pressure was unrelenting, and for two weeks the Viet Minh continued to dig trenches while attacking the central defensive positions at Eliane, Claudine, Dominique and Huguette. By 30 March, Isabel, further south, and its 1,800 defenders were cut off. At the end of April, its defenders were without water and ammunition was scarce.

At the same time, the French officers at Dien Bien Phu had lost confidence in de Castries, who was increasingly detached from the situation, often secluded in his bunker and unable to exercise command. Stories of an armed 'mutiny', during which the colonel was told he would retain command in name only while others effectively took charge, have circulated. It is known that an effort to replace de Castries with Major General René Cogny was unsuccessful when Cogny's plane from Hanoi was unable to land at Dien Bien Phu, driven off by intense communist anti-aircraft fire.

The fight for Dien Bien Phu had become a battle of attrition, and its outcome was inevitable as the surrounded defenders were systematically pounded into submission. Five undermanned battalions defended strongpoints Dominique and Eliane east of the Nam Yum River, and a pitched battle erupted at Dominique in late March. Although two positions fell rapidly to the Viet Minh, the third held on tenaciously as the gunners of the 4th Colonial Artillery Regiment levelled their

weapons and fired point-blank into the faces of the attackers.

The Viet Minh were pushed back from Dominique, but other assaults gained ground as the 316th Regiment forced Moroccan troops from portions of Eliane, which were recaptured in a French counterattack later. Portions of Huguette also changed hands more than once. Although the French had fewer than a dozen tanks at Dien Bien Phu, their appearance near Eliane on the night of 31 March helped maintain a tenuous hold on the strongpoint.

When Major Marcel Bigeard received authorisation from Colonel Langlais to withdraw from a portion of Eliane, he bravely retorted: "As long as I have one man alive I will not let go of Eliane 4. Otherwise, Dien Bien Phu is done for!"

As the fighting stretched into mid-April, the Viet Minh sustained heavy casualties. One regiment was caught in the open and devastated by French artillery and fighter-bombers. Giap, however, was undeterred. He ordered reinforcements to the area from across the Laotian frontier. A French counterattack on 10 April managed to retake portions of Eliane, but Huguette was overrun by the 22nd and the communists claimed nearly all of the precious airstrip, rendering resupply for the beleaguered French in their shrinking perimeter nearly impossible.

Following the costly April attacks, Giap relied more on advancing trenches and infiltration to erode the French will to resist. Then, on 1 May, he ordered heavy attacks that overran portions of Eliane, Dominique and Huguette. Five days later, the Viet Minh detonated a large mine beneath Eliane, which devastated remaining defensive areas. Hours later, the strongpoint fell. On 7 May, the communists, outnumbering the French more than eight to one, renewed their attacks.

"THE ENEMY HAS OVERRUN US! WE ARE BLOWING UP EVERYTHING! VIVE LA FRANCE!' HE THEN SMASHED HIS RADIO WITH THE BUTT OF A RIFLE"

Desperation and defeat

Despite his lack of command presence, de Castries knew the end was near. He contacted Cogny in Hanoi and said bluntly: "The Viets are everywhere. The situation is very grave. The combat is confused and goes on all about. I feel the end is approaching, but we will fight to the finish." Cogny replied: "Of course, you have to finish the whole thing now. But what you have done until now is surely magnificent. Don't spoil it by hoisting the white flag… no surrender, no white flag."

Nevertheless, concern for the wounded and the obvious futility of a continued struggle weighed on de Castries in the last hours. As Viet Minh soldiers swarmed toward the headquarters bunker, its radio operator sent a final communication: "The enemy has overrun us! We are blowing up everything! Vive la France!" He then smashed his radio with the butt of a rifle.

A short time later, a French officer peered from a trench near his command post, the last that remained. Only 15 metres away, he saw a small white flag. From behind it, the silhouette of a Viet Minh soldier emerged and asked in French: "You're not going to shoot anymore?"

The officer responded: "No, I'm not going to shoot anymore."

The fight for Dien Bien Phu was over. The humiliation of the French was complete, and their influence in Asia extinguished. The Viet Minh had lost 8,000 dead and approximately 15,000 wounded. However, they had captured 12,000 prisoners – including 5,000 wounded men – and 1,150 French soldiers had died.

Giap had won a tremendous victory. De Castries was held prisoner for four months while negotiations to end the fighting led to the Geneva Accords, dividing Indochina at the 17th parallel.

The communist-dominated north was backed by the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. The United States supported the south, which was not a party to the Geneva agreement. Although the last French soldiers departed Vietnam in 1956 as their colonial empire crumbled, years of conflict remained before Vietnam was unified under communist rule and peace was finally realised in Southeast Asia.

FURTHER READING

- *Valley of the Shadow, the Siege of Dien Bien Phu* by Kevin Boylan and Luc Olivier
- *Dien Bien Phu* by John Keegan
- *Dien Bien Phu 1954* by David Stone

French paratrooper reinforcements occupy trenches during the battle

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Heroes of the Medal of Honor

EDDIE RICKENBACKER

Proving he wouldn't ask his pilots to do anything he wouldn't do himself, this lieutenant flew a solo mission over Billy, France, on 25 September 1918, taking on seven enemy planes

WORDS: **MURRAY DAHM**

To prove to the men of his 94th Aero Squadron that he was one of them, Lieutenant Eddie Rickenbacker took to the air alone on 25 September, 1918, over Billy, France. Spotting seven enemy planes – five Fokker D.VIIs protecting two Halberstadt CL.IIs – Rickenbacker, disregarding the odds, attacked without hesitation and fired on the enemy formation. Diving through the German planes, he downed one of the Fokkers and one of the Halberstadts and returned home. For this action he was awarded his eighth (a record) Distinguished Service Cross, and in 1931 President Herbert Hoover awarded him the Medal of Honor for this action.

By the time of America's entry into World War I in April 1917, Rickenbacker was already a household name. Obsessed with engines, he had become a mechanic to the racing driver Lee Frayer in the 1906 Vanderbilt Cup at the age of only 15. In 1910 he became a race-car driver himself, taking part in the Indianapolis 500 in 1911. Rickenbacker joined the Duesenberg brothers to develop a new Mason racing car with which he achieved national fame in 1914, becoming known as 'Fast Eddie' for his hard driving and his daring – skills he would utilise as a pilot. He set a world land speed record at Daytona in 1914 of 215km/h (134mph). He moved around various racing teams and came close to being the champion driver in 1916. That year he signed on to the British Sunbeam team and sailed to the UK, despite the war. He was detained in Liverpool, suspected of being the son of a disowned Prussian baron, but a newspaper had invented these 'facts'. He was, in fact, the third son of Swiss-German Ohio immigrants. However, he soon abandoned the original spelling of his name, Rickenbacher.

Rickenbacker had already shown some interest in aviation (his first flight was in 1916) and his time in England reinforced that interest. He suggested making a flying squadron out of racing car drivers, men who were experts in motors and speed. Rickenbacker volunteered as soon as America entered WWI, despite the fact he was earning an estimated $40,000 a year as a racing driver. Rickenbacker arrived in France as the chauffeur to Major Townsend F Dodd, the fist commissioned US Army aviator. Fixing a broken motor, Rickenbacker also impressed Lieutenant Colonel Billy Mitchell (the man regarded as the father of the United States Air Force). Rickenbacker may have pestered both these aviators to give him a chance in the air. First, however, he was asked to become the chief engineer at the flight school at Issoudun Aerodrome, the largest airbase in the world at the time, where U.S. airmen were trained before leaving for the front. Rickenbacker seized his chance and undertook flight training – possibly lying about his age, claiming to be 25 (the upper limit). He was in fact 26. He received five weeks training, with a total of 25 air hours, in September 1917 and was commissioned as a lieutenant.

Rickenbacker's fellow trainees considered him uncouth and out of place. Most pilots were college students and the rough, brusque Ohioan was shunned, despite his expertise. He was also over age and had no college degree (a requirement), but still he persisted. By March, Rickenbacker had finished gunnery training and moved to the Villeneuve-les-Vertus Aerodrome. There he was mentored by Major Raoul Lufbery, a fighter ace who had served with the French Air Force before serving with the United States Army Air Service from 1917. The newly established 94th Aero Squadron, the 'Hat-in-the-ring' gang, was led by Lufbery flying Nieuport 28 fighters, although many lacked armament. Rickenbacker's first combat patrol, on 6 March 1918, was with Lufbery and another pilot; only Lufbery's plane had guns. Rickenbacker made his first sortie on 13 April and on 29 April shot down his first enemy plane. The man who accompanied Rickenbacker and Lufbery on 6 March was Lieutenant Douglas Campbell – he shot down his first enemy on 14 April and became America's first 'ace' of the war.

By 28 May (less than a month after his fist victory) Rickenbacker had shot down his fifth enemy plane, earning his 'ace' status. He was

"WHILE ON A VOLUNTARY PATROL OVER THE LINES, LIEUTENANT RICKENBACKER ATTACKED SEVEN ENEMY PLANES... DISREGARDING THE ODDS AGAINST HIM, HE DIVED ON THEM..."

Medal of Honor citation, 1931

Captain Rickenbacker with his Medal of Honor in 1931

Source: Wiki / PD / Gov

awarded the Croix de Guerre for his efforts. Later he would be awarded the first of his eight Distinguished Service Crosses for his victory on 29 April (his actions on 25 September were also later awarded the Medal of Honor). By that time in May, however, Lufbery had died on the 19th, and Rickenbacker was sick with an abscess. During his convalescence, Rickenbacker reflected that he needed to be less foolhardy as a pilot and more disciplined. (He had become lost in fog and was forced to land his plane in a field on one of his first flights, and had almost crashed more than once.) Returning to active duty in September 1918, the squadron was now equipped with reliable Spad XIIIs and Rickenbacker's tally began to rise. A new commander was needed for the squadron and 27-year-old Lieutenant Rickenbacker was chosen on 24 September. To show he was a leader who would never abandon his pilots or ask them to do something he wasn't willing to do himself, Rickenbacker went up alone on 25 September over Billy.

In total, Rickenbacker achieved a tally of 26 victories, making him the 'Ace of Aces' for the United States during WWI. His tally would not be exceeded by an American pilot until Captain Richard Bong on 12 April, 1944 (Bong would be America's top ace of WWII, with 40 victories). Rickenbacker still ranks as the USA's tenth top ace of all time. Rickenbacker's last 14 victories were achieved in October 1918, the penultimate month of the war, a month during which he was promoted to captain. Confirmation of victories was needed and several did not come for some time (even after the war). Rickenbacker's first solo victory (on 7 May, 1918) wasn't confirmed until another pilot (James Hall) who had been shot down and captured later in the same flight was released. Rickenbacker did not like his title of 'Ace of Aces' – it had been given out with much fanfare to pilots during the war and the three previous holders, Lufbery, David Putnam and Frank Luke, had all been shot down and killed. Rickenbacker's luck, however, would continue to hold.

Soon the 94th squadron was taking out observation balloons to 'blind the eyes of the enemy', and as proof of his leadership several of Rickenbacker's men downed more of them than he did. Rickenbacker, however, flew more missions and had more hours in the air than his men, amassing 300 combat hours and 134 'dogfights'. He had several rules for his fliers to ensure their success and survival – he approached his enemies carefully and got up close before opening fire. (Early on the guns on his Nieuport 28 kept jamming at this crucial moment, robbing him of several victories.) He encouraged his men to only attack if they had at least a 50% chance of success, and to break for home if necessary. He held meetings with his pilots to discuss tactics and used

"I WAS THE ONLY AUDIENCE FOR THE GREATEST SHOW EVER PRESENTED. ON BOTH SIDES OF NO MAN'S LAND, THE TRENCHES ERUPTED. BROWN-UNIFORMED MEN POURED OUT OF THE AMERICAN TRENCHES, GRAY-GREEN UNIFORMS OUT OF THE GERMAN. FROM MY OBSERVER'S SEAT OVERHEAD, I WATCHED THEM THROW THEIR HELMETS IN THE AIR, DISCARD THEIR GUNS, WAVE THEIR HANDS"

Rickenbacker in 1967

Rickenbacker immediately after WWI in 1919

A modern replica of a Spad XIII in the colours of Rickenbacker's 94th Aero Squadron

Issoudun Aerodrome in 1918, where Rickenbacker received only five weeks training – a total of 25 hours flying time

Rickenbacker in his Spad XIII, in which he scored the majority of his victories

blackboards to plot out how attacks could be managed. As a mechanic, he also stressed the importance of engine maintenance and the reliability of the aircraft as paramount to their success as fliers. Later, his rules included punctuality, loyalty, thrift, and a workaholic-like schedule (he would work seven days a week).

When the Armistice was declared in November 1918, Rickenbacker flew over No Man's Land alone and witnessed the lines of American and German troops meeting in celebration. When he was discharged, he was promoted to major, although he felt he hadn't earned that promotion and so used captain (he became known as 'Captain Eddie') for the rest of his career. He wrote a book, *Fighting the Flying Circus*, in 1919 but returned to the motor industry and founded the Rickenbacker Motor Company in 1922. Though soon burdened with massive debts, he refused to declare bankruptcy.

With backing he bought and became the president of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in 1927 and took up a position with Cadillac and LaSalle for General Motors. He began writing a comic strip in 1933, *Ace Drummond*, which was syndicated in 135 newspapers nationwide. The stories were inspired by his WWI experiences (he had refused a film career where he would have been employed in 'unspecified roles'). The illustrator for the comic was Clayton Knight, a fellow WWI aviator (although a New Yorker, he had flown for the British Royal Flying Corps). The series was turned into a film serial in 1936.

All the while, Rickenbacker promoted the potential of aviation and encouraged several cities to develop airports. His most long-lasting venture was the establishment of Eastern Air Lines with help through his contacts at General Motors in 1934. He had already seen the potential of air mail and passenger transport in the 1920s and, with associates, he bought the company from General Motors in 1938, becoming president and general manager. In this capacity, Rickenbacker led many innovations in commercial aviation. He established connections with the Douglas Aircraft Company, although he later resisted the adoption of commercial jet aircraft – why replace perfectly good turboprop airliners with expensive jets, he asked. He also survived several air crashes (he did not use the word 'safe' of flying but preferred 'reliable'), such as in Atlanta in February 1941 when he was gravely wounded, taking more than a year to recover from his injuries.

Rickenbacker supported the USA joining World War II before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 and, when America joined the conflict, he toured training facilities in the USA and England as a non-military observer. He also directed Eastern Air Lines to fly American troops as well as munitions and other supplies across the Atlantic. (This was a requirement, but Rickenbacker encouraged the company to fulfill its duty to the best of its ability.) He was involved in recommendations for military operations and was an advisor on bombing strategy to both the Royal Air Force and the United States Army Air Force.

In October 1942 he was sent by US Secretary of War, Henry L Stimson, to the Pacific theatre. His B-17D flew off course and needed to ditch close to Japanese-controlled islands. Adrift for 24 days, Rickenbacker assumed command of the survivors and they caught fish to sustain themselves – eventually all but one of the men was rescued. The ordeal led to reforms of survival equipment (which from then on included fishing tackle and rubber sheets to protect men from sunburn and catch drinkable water) and navigation equipment. Rickenbacker was then sent to the USSR in 1943 on a fact-finding mission (including what the Russians were doing with Lend-Lease equipment). He had clashed with President Roosevelt prior to the war over cancellations of air mail contracts during the New Deal in 1934 and so all his 'official' missions came through Stimson rather than the president. At the conclusion of his trip, he did debrief with Winston Churchill but never met with President Roosevelt.

He resigned as president of Eastern Air Lines in 1959, finally retiring in 1963. He published his autobiography in 1967 and died in Switzerland in 1973 at the age of 82. His career is remembered for his achievements as America's Ace of Aces in WWI but his legacy extends well beyond that. In everything he did he brought persistence and determination to do the best he possibly could.

Images: Wiki / PD / Gov

SURVIVING MOUNT LONGDON

WORDS: TOM GARNER

© James O'Connell

Above: *James O'Connell pictured on a landing craft going ashore at Ascension Island en route to the Falklands*

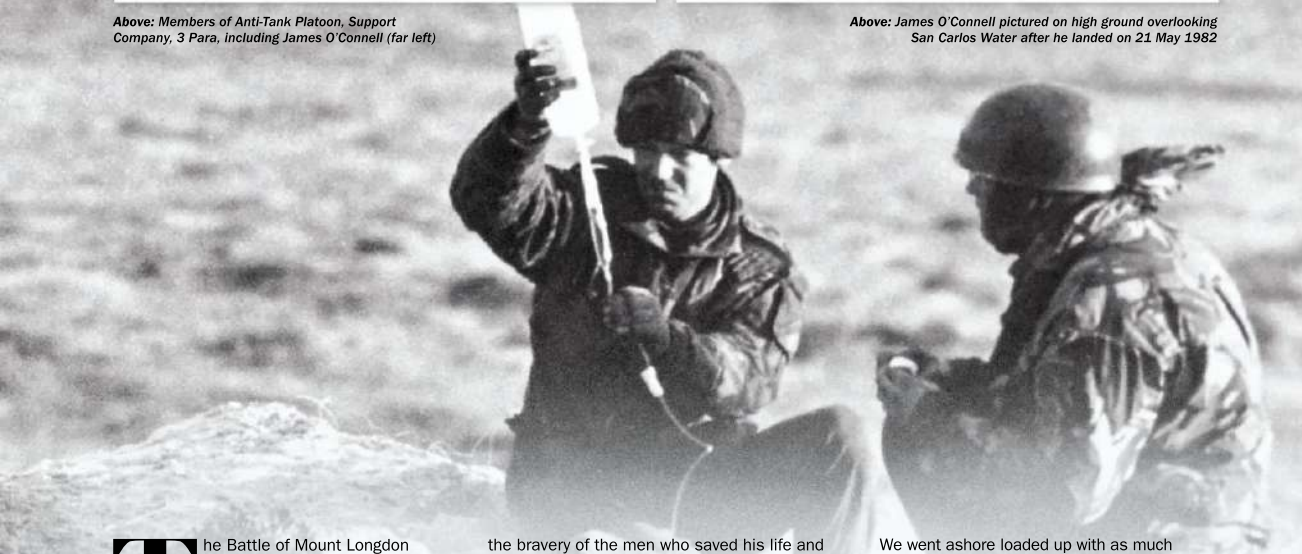
INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR AND VETERAN JAMES O'CONNELL

On the night of 11-12 June 1982, 3 Para launched a determined assault against a heavily entrenched Argentine position in the mountainous terrain of East Falkland. Here one veteran recalls his memories of the combat, and how he was severely wounded during the bloodiest battle of the Falklands War

Wounded British paratroopers receive emergency medical treatment under fire during the Battle of Mount Longdon

***Above:** Members of Anti-Tank Platoon, Support Company, 3 Para, including James O'Connell (far left)*

***Above:** James O'Connell pictured on high ground overlooking San Carlos Water after he landed on 21 May 1982*



The Battle of Mount Longdon saw Argentine and British troops engaged in a bitter struggle over a key position near the Falkland Islands capital of Port Stanley. The British emerged victorious from the battle but it was their bloodiest land engagement of the war, with 23 killed and 48 wounded. The Argentineans lost 44 killed, 120 wounded and 50 captured.

Despite its ferocity, the battle has been relatively overlooked compared to other actions of the war. Nevertheless, for the men of the 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment (3 Para) Mount Longdon was a terrible experience. Among the many wounded was a 22-year-old paratrooper from Liverpool: Private James O'Connell.

A member of the Anti-Tank Platoon, Support Company, 3 Para, O'Connell received a severe wound to the face and lost his right eye. He eventually recovered from his life-changing injury and is now the author of *Three Days in June*, an extraordinary account of the battle. Five years in the making, O'Connell interviewed as many veterans as possible (both British and Argentine) to re-create a definitive 360-degree account of the battle. Speaking ahead of its publication, he recalls ferocious enemy fire, the bravery of the men who saved his life and reconciliations with Argentine veterans.

Were you surprised when Argentina invaded the Falklands?

Yes, at the time we were having weekly intelligence briefings mainly about the Russian threat; it was the era of the Cold War and we'd be doing armoured vehicle recognition for Russian tanks etc, so the invasion came as a complete surprise to us.

What were your first impressions of the islands when you disembarked?

They reminded me of Brecon and when we landed our job was to secure an area called Windy Gap, which was the high ground overlooking Port San Carlos. We immediately went up from the landing craft and took the high ground. It was exhausting because of all the kit we were carrying. Argentine planes came in as we were halfway up and it was quite an exciting feeling of, "This is real." I looked back as the planes were attacking ships in what became known as Bomb Alley. I remember seeing the [converted troopship] SS Canberra, which was nicknamed The White Whale. It stood out like a sore thumb and bombs were landing around it but we carried on and secured the top.

We went ashore loaded up with as much ammo as we could carry. We were told that non-essential kit such as the sleeping bags would follow but they were jettisoned by the helicopters during an air attack and went into the sea. I never got a sleeping bag from landing on 21 May until reaching Mount Estancia just before Mount Longdon, so we froze virtually all the time.

What were conditions like on 3 Para's 97km trek across East Falkland?

SS Atlantic Conveyor had been sunk along with its helicopters so we had to walk. The ground was like walking on a sponge. It was full of water, bog holes and river crossings, and it was absolutely freezing. We walked 30 miles [48km] to Teal Inlet, slept overnight there and then carried on to Estancia Farm. That was another 30 miles and when we arrived we went straight up to our positions on Mount Vernet and stayed there with C Company.

We sat tight and froze on top of a mountain. While we were up there the Argentines were randomly dropping 1,000lb bombs. They shook the mountain but fortunately never did any harm. During this period it was just so cold, I did think I would get hypothermia – in the night we used to jump up and down because it was just too cold to sleep.

© Getty

James O'Connell pictured at his position on Mount Vernet, a location on the long trek from San Carlos Water to Mount Longdon

© James O'Connell

What was the battle plan for Mount Longdon?
The plan was a silent attack passing through minefields to reach the objective. 6 Platoon, B Company would go up the western slope of the mountain while 4 and 5 Platoon would move along the northern side and secure the eastern end (codenamed Full Back). A and C Company would secure an area codenamed Wing Forward. Once B Company had secured Mount Longdon, A and C Company would advance further east and capture Wireless Ridge (codenamed Rum Punch) but only if time allowed.

I was with C Company and went to Wing Forward. A Company were 100 metres to our front and we were there as a reserve to react to any problems that B Company would have. However, like every plan it all went to pot once battle commenced.

What were your experiences of the battle?
We were moving to our designated area and had to cross the Furze Bush stream which indicated the battalion start line. We then climbed up a rocky bank. At the same time, Corporal Milne of 4 Platoon was moving along the northwest corner of Mount Longdon when he stood on a mine. This caused the Argentines to open fire on their pre-recorded targets, including our location. Fortunately, the fire was passing about ten feet [three metres] over our heads, but it was quite scary.

As we moved to our designated area the incoming machine gun fire was increasing. The Argentines weren't sure where we were but knew we were to their front somewhere. Mortar and artillery fire was now falling all around us. We could see that B Company were heavily in contact pushing west to east and we were to the enemy's north.

Fortunately for us the mortar and artillery rounds were falling into the extremely boggy ground and plunging deep into the peat. However, once they struck rocks they would explode and shower us with mud and water. The noise was tremendous.

How were you wounded?
My section commander called out for an IWS, which was a first-generation night sight. I crawled over and gave it to him but as I crawled back the incoming fire was now only just passing over us at a matter of only a foot or so. The next thing I knew a round struck me. It went through the bridge of my nose, passing left to right, glancing my cheek and carrying on. In doing so, it took out the centre of my nose, right eye, cheekbone and broke off my front teeth.

I was thrown backwards and my helmet came off. I might have made a noise as Geordie Nicholson shouted, "Are you alright?" I felt my face with my muddied glove – there was a large hole. I shouted, "Geordie, I've been hit!" Geordie crawled over and said, "Where've you been hit?" I said, "It's my face!" He shone a shielded torch in my face and said, "F***ing hell!" I quickly replied, "I've got two shell dressings in my top right pocket – get them on my face."

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***Left:** Sergeant Ian McKay of B Company, 3 Para was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for displaying "courage and leadership of the highest order" at Mount Longdon*

"IT WAS JUST SO COLD, I DID THINK I WOULD GET HYPOTHERMIA. IN THE NIGHT WE USED TO JUMP UP AND DOWN BECAUSE IT WAS JUST TOO COLD TO SLEEP"

Young Argentinean soldiers await an assault by British forces

© Getty

An abandoned Argentinean recoilless gun pictured on Mount Longdon, 20 March 2007

© Getty

How were you removed from the battlefield?
Other people had also been wounded in our area. Corporal Paddy Rehill had been shot in the face and Corporal Stephen Hope had been shot in the head. Medics went looking for us and Lance Corporal Dave Stott found and treated me. I was dragged to a large shell hole, which was soon filled with other wounded soldiers. Our reserve area was now under heavy mortar and artillery fire when suddenly Corporal Hope was rolled into the shell hole and landed on top of me. He was snoring heavily. At the time I didn't know but that is a sign of an extremely bad head wound.

It was a chaotic night and after my wounding, with the loss of blood and the cold I was tempted to fall asleep. Luckily, the medics were trying to keep everyone awake. When I did nod off, they would quickly shake and occasionally slap me by saying forcefully, "Don't you fall asleep, stay awake!" One of the reasons I wrote the book was to give recognition for what they did to keep me alive.

We couldn't leave our position because of the artillery fire; the doctors were located at the Regimental Aid Post (RAP) a kilometre away. By 6am we were in such a bad way it was decided to place us in ponchos that acted as stretchers and carry us to the RAP. However, there was a minefield between the RAP and us. The engineers had recced a route through the minefield but in the chaos and darkness no one knew where this route was. Undeterred, they began making their way through the minefield.

"HE LAY ACROSS ME TO SHIELD ME FROM FURTHER INJURY WHILE ROUNDS EXPLODED ALL AROUND US"

We came under artillery bombardment, the wounded were dropped and everyone scattered to take cover, except for Lance Corporal Paul Wray. He lay across me to shield me from further injury while rounds exploded all around us.

They eventually got us to the RAP, where we were seen by the doctors. I was loaded onto a stretcher and moved to another area with Corporal Hope; I later found out we were thought to be non-survivable casualties. Eventually, I was loaded onto a stretcher and was being taken to a temporary mortuary when I moved. This prompted one stretcher-bearer to say, "This one's alive!"

I was taken back and I remember being loaded into a Snowcat vehicle with a group of other wounded. Corporal Hope later died. As soon as the Snowcat moved away from the RAP we came under shellfire again. We were a very easy target because we were moving at such a slow speed. We were in fact a legitimate target because the Snowcats also were bringing ammunition forward.

We eventually reached an area west of the Murrell River and waited for a helicopter. We were now in a bad way but eventually a Gazelle helicopter came out of the darkness. Four of us were loaded onboard and taken to Teal Inlet. I was carried into a shed where they cut my clothes off to look for further injuries. I was then loaded into a Wessex helicopter and I remember seeing the coastline of the Falklands as we flew out to sea and thinking, "That's it, I'm out of here."

What was your opinion of the Argentine fighting ability?
They were good. There are all these stories about how their troops would run away, but these Argentines fought. You have to give credit where it's due: they stood there, manned their GPMGs [general-purpose machine guns] and put fire down. There's an ex-Argentinean marine I speak to regularly, Corporal Domingo Lamas, who manned his .50-cal machine gun and stayed until the bitter end. He only withdrew because he was virtually surrounded and moved back to defend the Full Back location.

How did you cope with your injury in the years after the war?
I had five years of surgery – numerous operations. During these early years I think we all had mental health problems to some degree; I think a lot of us medicated with drink. It sounds awful but we drank because it was a way of blotting it out. Back then, there were no computers, mobile phones or helplines to call. When you were home, wherever you lived, you

A memorial cross atop Mount Longdon that commemorates the British and Argentine troops who died in the battle

Before he fought in the Falklands War, James O'Connell served in Germany and Northern Ireland

© James O'Connell

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were on your own. No one asked how you were and there were many who took their own lives during this period.

When I left the army I mistakenly thought that I would be looked on favourably for work because of my injury but I couldn't get a job. Liverpool in the 1980s wasn't the best place for work and the Disability Discrimination Act didn't exist then – you had to have two eyes for everything. One of my friends eventually suggested becoming a taxi driver and I said, "Surely you've got to have two eyes?" However, I did become a black cab driver for 23 years! I made the best of a bad job and eventually ran a small taxi company.

What made you write Three Days in June?

My friends who saved my life never got the recognition they deserved and I've never read a book that reflected the battle as I knew it. The battle took place in multiple areas of the mountain, with some platoons fighting on one side of the mountain and others on the top and bottom. I wanted to give a better understanding of where and why things happened and put the record straight. To get a more accurate account I thought I'd interview the battalion!

What was it like to interview other veterans, including Argentines?

I was fortunate in having close contacts within the battalion. I interviewed our Commanding Officer Sir Hew Pike, which led to the company commanders, platoon sergeants and everyone who was anyone. I interviewed veterans in person, by phone, Skype, and travelled across the UK. It was one of the best times of my life and being a fellow veteran of the battle I could talk freely with my colleagues, many of whom had never spoken about their experiences before, including several major generals.

The Argentine veterans were very helpful. They're basically the same as you and me, and if anyone knows what 3 Para went through it was them. I interviewed one veteran who killed a good friend of mine and wounded others. It's hard, but has to be done and if you want to fully understand why certain things happened then you must speak to the enemy.

War is a terrible thing but time moves on. You can go through life feeling angry and bitter, but I'm not that type of person. I will never forget those terrible times and the friends we lost.

Why has Mount Longdon been overlooked compared to other Falklands battles?

When I came back nobody had heard of Mount Longdon. I got fed up with people who knew I'd been in the Parachute Regiment saying, "Were you at Goose Green?" The war ended shortly after Mount Longdon and became the big news instead. Because of the delay in getting news back to the UK, it was simply overlooked.

Everybody had heard of the Battle of Goose Green because it was in all the newspapers, and Colonel H Jones was killed. It was everywhere and everyone thought I was in 2 Para rather than 3 Para. People have even asked me, "Did 3 Para go to the Falklands?" and I have to say, "Yes, they did!"

What would you like people to remember about the battle's legacy?

With the 40th anniversary approaching I want people to remember the bravery of the young men who sailed south in 1982 and fought and died for their country in a faraway place. Many were barely out of school so it was a really young battalion. I wouldn't have sent them to get a newspaper let alone fight on Mount Longdon. I would just like people to remember it because it seems to have become the unsung battle of the Falklands.

Three Days in June: 3 Para's Battle for Mount Longdon by James O'Connell is published by Monoray, Octopus Books and contains a foreword by Major General Jonathan Shaw CB, CBE. To purchase a copy visit:

www.octopusbooks.co.uk

ILYUSHIN IL-2 SHTURMOVIK

The 'bread and air' of the Soviet Air Force during World War II

WORDS **STUART HADAWAY**

Shturmoviks sweep in for an attack, November 1941

© Alamy

PROTECTIVE 'BATH'

The bath-shaped armoured forward section was heavy (950kg) and provided very effective protection. It withstood any ground fire below 20mm calibre, while even heavier rounds were frequently deflected.

ARMOURED BULKHEADS

Although the cockpit was one long structure, thick armoured bulkheads between the pilot and the gunner protected the former from enemy fighters behind and the latter from ground fire from ahead. The rear main fuel tank sat between the bulkheads.

POWERFUL PUNCH

The Shturmovik's main anti-tank weapons were its cannon. Far more accurate than rockets, the shells could tear through the thinner armour on top of armoured vehicles. The 37mm cannon used from 1943 could cripple even PzKw VI Tiger tanks.

BOMB BAYS

Two small bomb bays sat either side of the fuselage under the inner wings. Further bombs would then be carried externally on pylons set between each pair of bomb bays. Rockets were carried under the outer wings.

Over 36,000 Shturmoviks were built during WWII and the aircraft played a crucial role in driving the Nazis out of the USSR

© Getty

Illustration: Battlefield Design

By 1944, the Ilyushin Il-2 Shturmovik made up around 30% of the Soviet Air Force's front line. This rugged and versatile aircraft packed a heavy punch that inflicted untold damage on the German invaders from June 1941 right through to the end of the war. It was one of the most successful ground attack aircraft ever built, and the term 'Shturmovik' went from being the generic Soviet designation for a ground attack aircraft to be being indelibly linked to this one type. Over 36,000 were made, and it is little wonder that the Soviet Army called the Shturmovik the 'Flying Tank', the German Army called it the 'Black Death', and Joseph Stalin called it the 'bread and air' of the Soviet Air Force.

The Il-2 was heavily armoured and armed, but easy to operate and maintain in rough field conditions. Optimised for low-level attack, it could both hand out and soak up heavy damage. Although early, single-seat models were vulnerable to German fighter attack, the most common variant (the two-seat Il-2m3) was brutally effective, capable of destroying not only Germany's heaviest tanks but also wreaking havoc among the transport that constantly struggled to keep their armies supplied.

"THE SOVIET ARMY CALLED IT THE 'FLYING TANK', THE GERMAN ARMY CALLED IT THE 'BLACK DEATH'"

ILYUSHIN IL-2M3

COMMISSIONED:	1938
ORIGIN:	SOVIET UNION
LENGTH:	11.6M (38FT 3IN)
WINGSPAN:	14.6M (47FT 11IN)
ENGINE:	MIKULIN AM38F 1,270KW (1,700HP) V-12 ENGINE
CREW:	2
PRIMARY WEAPON:	2 X 23MM VYA OR 37MM N37 CANNON, 2 X 7.62MM MACHINE GUNS, 1 X 12.7MM MACHINE GUN
SECONDARY WEAPON:	UP TO 600KG (1,323LB) BOMBS, ROCKETS, OR A 53CM TORPEDO

"THE ARMOURED FRONT WAS NEVER COMPROMISED AND GAVE THE AIRCRAFT (AND ESPECIALLY THE ENGINE AND CREW) SUPERB PROTECTION"

A formation of Shturmoviks on the hunt for enemy targets

© Alamy

ARMAMENT

The Il-2m3 had two cannon (23mm VYa, or from 1943 37mm N37) and two 7.62mm ShKAS machine guns fixed in the wings, operated by the pilot. A single 12.7mm Berezin UBT machine gun was operated by the rear gunner. Six 100kg (220lb) bombs or four PTAB anti-tank bomblet dispensers (totalling 192 bomblets) could be carried in small bomb bays in the wing roots and externally on pylons. Eight small RS82 or four larger RS132 rockets could also be carried on pylons, while the naval variant carried a 53cm torpedo.

An armourer reloads the cannon on an Il-2

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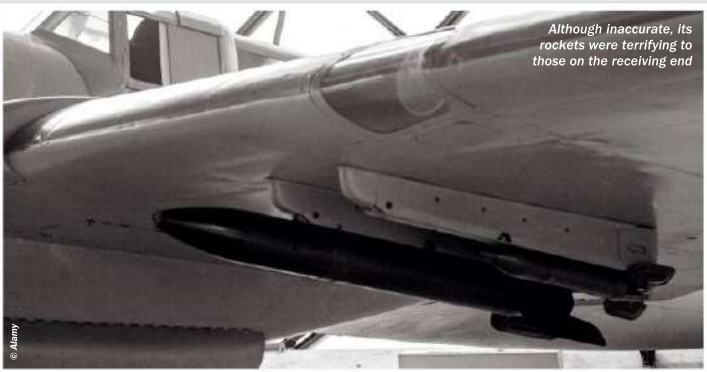
A formation of Shturmoviks could inflict incredible damage to already fragile German supply lines

© Alamy



Although inaccurate, its rockets were terrifying to those on the receiving end

© Alamy

ENGINE

The Shturmovik was powered by a single Mikulin AM38 liquid-cooled V-12 engine, driving a three-bladed metal variable pitch propeller. The Il-2m3 used the AM38F, which was strengthened and improved for better performance on take-off. Although it had a higher fuel consumption than the earlier models, the AM38F gave the pilot smoother control and overall better efficiency. It was designed for low-level use in the Il-2 and later Il-10 ground attack aircraft, which seldom operated at an altitude of more than a few thousand metres.

© Alamy

The Shturmovik was heavy for a single-engine aircraft, but only operated at low altitudes

DESIGN

The Il-2's design centred around its armoured cockpit area. This steel 'bath' encompassed the engine, oil and fuel tanks, and both crew. Rather than adding armour to an airframe, this thick structure formed the entire forward section of the aircraft. Metal-framed and metal-skinned wings and rear structure were attached directly. Early models had wooden rear fuselages due to material shortages or to save weight, but the armoured front was never compromised and gave the aircraft (and especially the engine and crew) superb protection against small arms fire and light flak.

The Il-2 was built around the armoured cockpit section, with rear fuselage and wings being bolted directly onto it

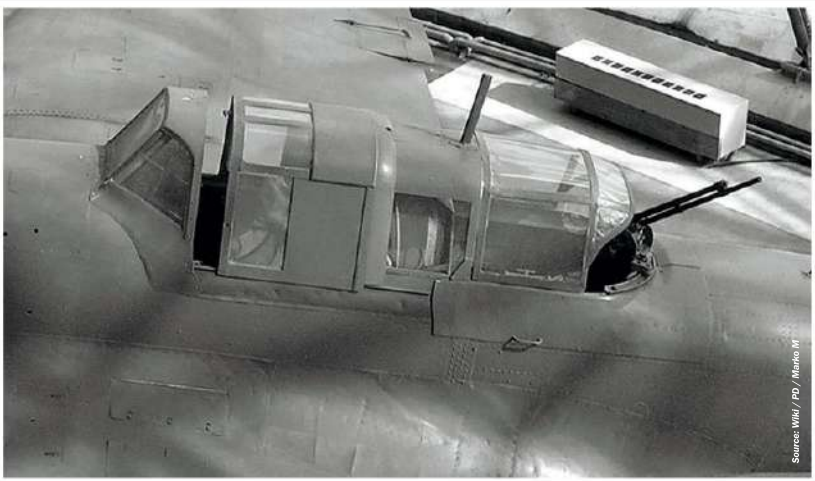
© Getty

A Shturmovik crew prepare for a sortie

© Alamy

COCKPIT

The Il-2's cockpit was basic and functional, reflecting the aircraft's own rugged and basic design. The pilot's controls were simple, and the control column had multiple firing buttons for the different weapons. The rear-gunner sat on a canvas strap rather than a proper seat, and had limited protection from the elements. The pilot's front windscreen was 55-65mm armourglass, with thinner armourglass sheets on the sides, but the rear cockpit was often left open to the elements to improve visibility. Although women flew the Shturmovik, there were no all-female units.



Source: Wiki / PD / Marko M

***Right:** The Il-2's crew were protected by thick armour*

SERVICE HISTORY

Although designed as a two-seat aircraft, the Il-2 entered service in the summer of 1941 as a single-seater. It was almost immediately thrown into efforts to stem the German invasion of the Soviet Union, and the lack of a rear gunner saw the type suffer heavy losses. Production halted for months while the factories were moved east of the Ural Mountains, but soon improved versions (with rear gunner reinstated) were flooding into service. Shturmoviks proved instrumental in halting the German advances and then slowly pushing them all the way back to Berlin.

In 1944 nearly a third of Soviet combat aircraft were Shturmoviks, equipping around 50 Soviet Air Force and Navy regiments, as well as Polish and Czechoslovakian units. From 1945 it was replaced in Soviet service by the Ilyushin Il-10 'Beast', a development of the Il-2, but remained in use with various Warsaw Bloc countries into the mid-1950s.

The Il-2 was simple and rugged, and easily maintained in rough field conditions

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Shturmoviks over the ruins of Berlin, April 1945

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HOME FRONT

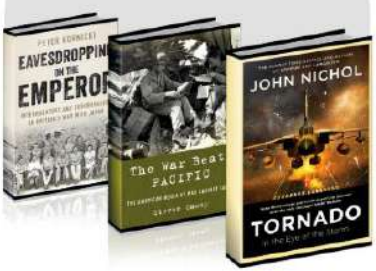
70 AMERICA'S LONGEST WARS

As the US and its allies prepare to withdraw from Afghanistan, author and veteran Sergio Miller discusses the parallels between the country's second-longest conflict: Vietnam

72 The latest museums and events

74 WWII this month: June 1941

76 The latest film and book reviews



HIGHWAYS TO NOWHERE
AMERICA'S LONGEST WARS

Will history judge the US and allied withdrawal from Afghanistan in September 2021 as an American failure comparable to the Vietnam War? Historian and former British Army Intelligence Corps officer Sergio Miller discusses some of the parallels between the conflicts

Members of the 196th Infantry Brigade prepare to board a troop-carrier plane at Phu Bai Airport near Hue for their flight back to the US

© Getty

During the Trump presidency, the conflict in Afghanistan became the longest war in American history. In two decades the Afghan patient had been lavished with more aid than war-devastated European countries received under the Marshall Plan (1948), but Washington found itself mired and no closer to victory, or even a modestly satisfactory settlement. No wonder the now-former president railed against what he saw as America's stupid, endless wars.

Trump's railing may have ended but the recriminations haven't. On 14 April President Biden announced the US would withdraw all troops from Afghanistan by the 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks. NATO allies will quickly and quietly follow. This hardly qualifies as the 'conditions-based' withdrawal repeatedly invoked by politicians and military leaders over the course of America's longest war, but there will be few dissenters.

The long conflict it displaced from the top spot was, of course, the Vietnam War. Separating these two long wars, like a rebuke, is the 100-hour Operation Desert Storm, leavened by a 42-day aerial battering that rendered the outcome a foregone confusion.

There is a broken chain linking these three wars. In Gulf War I every combat commander, from the late General Norman Schwarzkopf (a young captain in the November 1965 Ia Drang battles) to the brigade commanders, was a Vietnam veteran. By 2001 they had all quit the stage apart from Secretary of State Colin Powell, who served in the notorious Americal Division. Richard Nixon's *No More Vietnams* was not just unread, it appears it was entirely forgotten.

There is also a personal connection for myself. In Gulf War I, I was privileged to serve as an intelligence briefer to the UK Joint Force Commander. Witnessing decisive military victory was inspiring. This was how wars should be fought. It was with some disappointment, then, to later observe from the stalls the unfolding International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan. The same follies committed in Vietnam and even the same phrases ('Find-Fix-Finish', 'Clear and Hold' and others) were being repeated. It is strange to say but nevertheless true that the genesis of *In Good Faith* and *No Wider War*, my two-volume history of the Vietnam War, lies in the sands of Helmand rather than the paddy fields of the Mekong Delta.

The question hanging over all these entanglements always reduces to: why? Why did a collective of politicians and their advisors determine war was imperative, even urgently demanded? Why did military chiefs agree, some enthusiastically? The Joint Chiefs did not agree in the 1950s, warning Eisenhower that French Indochina was not worth the biscuit and would require the commitment of 12 unavailable divisions – a remarkably prescient assessment. Why did a cause elevated as vital to 'national interest' seem absurd to a later generation? When Battalion Landing Team 3/9 landed at Da Nang's Red Beach Two in March 1965 the Marines were met by a banner proclaiming: "Welcome Gallant Marines". Today the same beach presents an impressive front

3rd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, at a memorial service at Combat Outpost Carwile May 26, 2009 in Sayed Abad District, Wardak Province, Afghanistan

of expensive resort hotels. There are few better symbols of the absurdity of it all.

Vietnam, famously and unwisely, was justified by a bar room game: dominoes. The theory proposed that if one domino were to fall, all would fall. Or as one embittered veteran decried: "We died for a stupid slogan." That veteran, Charles Sabatier, had been paralysed in Vietnam and spent the rest of his life in a wheelchair. Far from the frontline, over-clever officials searched for reasons to keep the war going. The Domino Theory stretched in many directions, few credible. Creativity was not short in the procession of authors that filled National Security Action Memorandums with lurid warnings of the communist menace. The French first cynically raised the bogey to pocket American military largesse, but the Élysée knew perfectly well this was a nationalist struggle. So did enlightened Americans. When the disenchanted French embarked on the last homeward-bound troop ship – à vous Américains – America became Vietnam's god parent, as Kennedy put it.

What followed – 'escalation', the 'big unit war', Tet, Hue and Hamburger Hill, the stain of My Lai – have become part of the cultural landscape of the tumultuous Sixties. Generals forged in the experience of a world war found themselves commanding rebellious kids who grew their hair long, smoked weed and threatened to murder unpopular officers. Fighting the Germans was never like this.

A statesman was needed to end the mess and America got two. There was unintended geographical balance in the West Coast Richard Milhous Nixon and the East Coast academic Henry Alfred Kissinger, but there the comparison ends. A more unlikely pairing had not been seen in Washington DC, nor a more successful political double-act. Nixon took the war to the Cambodian sanctuaries – probably the single most successful ground operation of the war – and ordered the air force to stop "farting around" with "goddamn milk rounds". Kissinger endured the Calvary of drawn-out secret peace negotiations in Paris. "Peace is at hand," he declared in November 1972. "Peace is at the end of a pen," quipped his North Vietnamese counterpart Le Duc Tho, if only Saigon would sign.

Starting foolish wars is easy. Four presidents later it all ended in a violent climax. "Bomb the bejesus out of them," Kissinger counselled. The 1972 Christmas bombings provoked global outrage but also forced Hanoi's return to the negotiating table. The Paris Peace Accords were finally signed at the end of January in the Hotel Majestic, a former Gestapo headquarters. Two years later, following a 'decent interval', Saigon fell to the communists.

Nixon once advised Kissinger: "I have will in spades." So he did. But so did the hardmen of Hanoi. If there is a capstone lesson to learn from these military imbroglios – a dubious pursuit in most cases – it is that the side that wants it wins it. Over the course of the 1968 Tet Offensive an anonymous CIA analyst drafted a top-secret assessment of the North's morale. The communists, he wrote, were as determined as ever to win their war. No amount of American jackhammering would break the rock of Northern resolve. Yet it was no secret. Every wide-eyed honest observer would have said the same.

In 2003, when the Taliban re-formed under Mullah Omar, a warning was issued to the Western armies: the Taliban would not stop fighting until every last foreign soldier quit Afghanistan. Perhaps we should listen to our enemies.

Sergio Miller is the author of a new two-volume history of the Vietnam War, *In Good Faith* and *No Wider War*, published by Osprey. Both are available now.

www.ospreypublishing.com

MUSEUMS & EVENTS

Discover the Royal Air Force Museum's tribute to Jewish WWII personnel, the Tank Museum's new exhibition & a circular walk connecting three mighty Welsh castles

Honouring Jewish airmen

The Royal Air Force Museum and Chelsea FC's Foundation are launching a new, multifaceted project to commemorate the Jewish airmen and women who served during WWII

The Royal Air Force Museum and the Chelsea Foundation have joined forces to support the expansion of the museum's Hidden Heroes project. Sponsored by Chelsea FC club owner Roman Abramovich, the project will feature a new Bomber Command exhibition at the museum's London and Cosford sites, with a launch date in 2023.

The new displays will help the museum to continue raising awareness of the previously untold story of the Jewish personnel in the RAF during WWII and the vital role they played in defeating the Luftwaffe during the Battle of Britain. These heroes joined the RAF from all over the world to fight against tyranny, racism and anti-Semitism while being fully aware that they risked torture and execution if captured. Their fascinating stories are a powerful window to the past through which we can make links to today and inspire future generations.

The London exhibition is already home to an iconic Avro Lancaster, which was 'adopted' in 2020 by Roman Abramovich and the Chelsea Foundation to commemorate the many Jewish personnel of Bomber Command. The museum is also celebrating the 80th anniversary of the first test flight of the Lancaster.

New additions to the exhibition will include in-gallery screens exploring the contribution of Bomber Command's personnel and a small object display with links to Jewish Hidden Heroes. The Lancaster will be also be accompanied by an Augmented Reality interactive experience that shares the stories of Jewish RAF personnel.

Additionally, the Chelsea-RAF Museum partnership will bring to life the Jewish Hidden Heroes Community Outreach Programme. This will extend to the wider community through school networks in London to share the positive narrative of Jews fighting for Britain. It will also record stories for the Jewish section on the RAF Stories website.

Bruce Buck, Chelsea FC chairman says: "We are delighted to announce a three-year extension to our partnership with the RAF Museum. Chelsea FC is committed to tackling anti-Semitism through education and Hidden Heroes tells important stories about the bravery of Jewish RAF personnel during WWII."

Maggie Appleton, RAF Museum CEO adds: "We need to challenge prejudice in all its ugly forms. More than ever, we need to educate young minds to the experiences of previous generations – those who suffered as well as those who fought back. I am incredibly proud of our partnership with the Chelsea Foundation and the Jewish Hidden Heroes project. I hope it goes some way to challenging the rise of anti-Semitism and wider racism in society. These are inspiring stories of courage and human spirit which will endure and resonate."

To find out more about the Royal Air Force Museum visit: www.rafmuseum.org.uk

From left: Bruce Buck, Chelsea FC chairman; Lawrence Seymour 'Benny' Goodman, WWII RAF veteran; and Sir Andy Pulford, RAF Museum chairman

Image © Royal Air Force Museum

The Avro Lancaster bomber displayed in the RAF Museum, London

Image © Royal Air Force Museum

Jewish RAF personnel pictured in front of a Lancaster bomber during WWII

Image © Michael Cranfield

Three Castles of Gwent

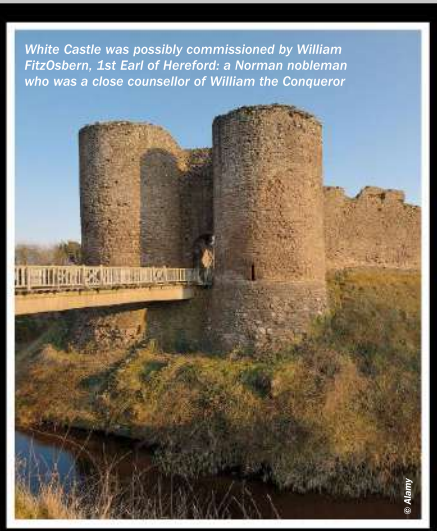
A trio of ruined medieval fortresses in southeast Wales are linked by a specially designed walk through spectacular countryside

Located in Monmouthshire in what was the ancient Welsh kingdom of Gwent, the Three Castles are three Norman fortifications in close proximity to each other. Consisting of Grosmont, Skenfrith and White Castles, the fortresses were established to protect the route from Wales to Hereford in England. They came under a single lordship during the 'Anarchy' of 1135-53 but most of their stonework dates from the 13th century.

Today, the ruined castles are managed by the Welsh heritage agency Cadw and are connected by a 30km modern circular footpath called the Three Castles Walk. The walk follows woods and hills, including the 423 metre-high Graig Syfyrddin near Skenfrith. There are also views of the Black Mountains, Forest of Dean and a link to a more ancient military structure along the Offa's Dyke Path at White Castle.

Of the three castles, White Castle is the best preserved with a substantial outer ward and a formidable inner ward behind a deep, water-filled moat. Grosmont Castle, overlooking the village of the same name, contains a dramatic dry moat and was once besieged by Owain Glyndwr. Meanwhile, Skenfrith Castle has a distinctive circular keep on the road between Abergavenny and Ross-on-Wye. Entry to all three castles is free and no pre-booking is required.

For more information visit: www.cadw.gov.wales



White Castle was possibly commissioned by William FitzOsbern, 1st Earl of Hereford: a Norman nobleman who was a close counsellor of William the Conqueror

Wartime Tank Stories

The internationally famous Tank Museum in Bovington, Dorset, has opened a major new exhibition on the Royal Armoured Corps during WWII

WW2: War Stories is the Tank Museum's new exhibition that tells the story of the men of the Royal Armoured Corps through a series of campaigns and battles, from the Battle of Arras in 1940 to the fall of Germany in 1945. First-hand testimony from tank crewmen will be at the centre of the displays, supported by 57 tanks and armoured vehicles from the Second World War.

The written and spoken testimony of veterans and soldiers features throughout, on graphic panels and films, alongside set-piece recreations and showcase displays that contain a variety of artefacts from medals to personal mementoes.

The exhibition begins with an introduction from veteran Ken Tout before visitors enter the main gallery space exploring war on the Home Front. The galleries are in chronological order, with each battle represented through a combination of first-hand accounts, objects, graphics and vehicles. The exhibition ends with the liberation of the concentration camps and the legacy of the Second World War, including Britain's first Main Battle Tank – the mighty Centurion.

The entire 315 square-metre exhibition, which opened online on 13 May 2021, has been planned and built over a three-year period and represents a major re-display for the Tank Museum.

***Below:** A Centurion tank at the Tank Museum*

WWII THIS MONTH...

JUNE 1941

To commemorate 80 years since the Second World War, **History of War** will be taking a look at some of the key events taking place during each month of the conflict

OPERATION BATTLEAXE

Indian soldiers of the 4th Indian Division decorate the side of their lorry 'Khyber pass to Hellfire Pass' in advance of Operation Battleaxe – the Allied offensive to push back Erwin Rommel's forces and relieve Tobruk, Libya. The Halfaya Pass, nicknamed 'Hellfire', was heavily defended by German anti-tank guns, which halted the British 7th Armoured Division.

RAZING KANDANOS

A sign erected after occupying Nazi forces destroyed the village of Kandanos in Crete on 2 June, 1941. Written in German and Greek is: "In retaliation for the bestial murder of a paratrooper platoon and half a platoon of pioneers, by armed men and women who were ambushing, Kandanos was destroyed."

Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-779-0003-22 / Seegers (Seegers) / CC-BY-SA

GREEK MASSACRE

Greek civilians confront German troops, gathered prior to the massacre of Kondomari in Crete. After the defeat of Allied forces during the invasion of the island, certain German occupying forces carried out executions of civilians in revenge for the high casualties inflicted on the invaders. In the aftermath of the battle, rumour spread that paratroopers had been brutally murdered by locals. On 2 June a massacre was carried out in the village of Kondomari, on the orders of General Kurt Student. A propaganda photographer, Franz-Peter Weixler, captured images prior to and during the massacre, in which male villagers were rounded up and shot. The following day the village of Kandanos was destroyed by the Germans, killing 180 inhabitants (see left).

© Getty

BATTLE FOR DAMASCUS

Free French Forces troops enter Damascus, Syria on 27 June, 1941. The city had been under the occupation of French forces loyal to the Vichy regime. Alongside Free French troops were Australian, Indian and British, who all took part in the battle to retake Damascus on 21 June. The Vichy forces withdrew to Beirut, their main base of operations in the region, but surrendered some weeks later.

© Getty

NAZIS TAKE VILNIUS

A crowd greets German soldiers in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, after their arrival on 24 June, just two days after the beginning of Operation Barbarossa.

© Getty

REVIEWS

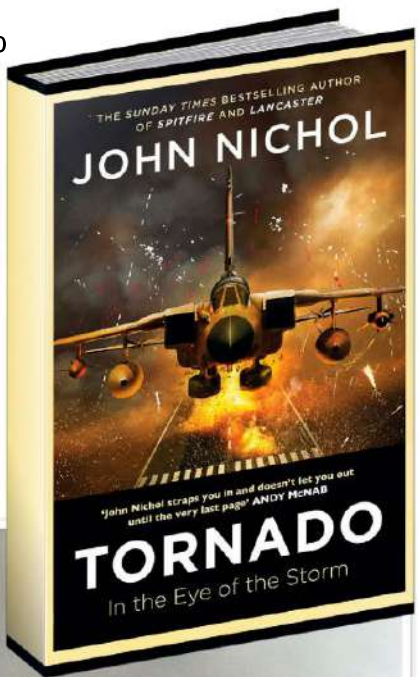
Our pick of the latest military history books and films

TORNADO

IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

A GRIPPING ACCOUNT OF THE RAF'S TORNADO FORCE IN THE 1ST GULF WAR

Author: John Nichol **Publisher:** Simon and Schuster **Price:** £20


THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF SPITFIRE AND LANCASTER
JOHN NICHOL
'John Nichol straps you in and doesn't let you out until the very last page' ANDY McNAB
TORNADO
In the Eye of the Storm

In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait and many of the Western forces that had spent 40 years training over the forests and plains of Germany found themselves deployed to the deserts of Saudi Arabia. Among them were the RAF's latest fast jet, the Panavia Tornado, which was about to embark on its first active deployment in what would stretch into 30 years of continuous operations. Thrown into an unfamiliar operational environment and climate, the type suffered from a number of technical problems which had to be overcome, as well as tactical and doctrinal issues that still cause controversy today. Despite these set backs, the force provided a unique and valuable contribution to the Coalition's efforts.

Nichols is well known as a member of a Tornado crew shot down during this war, but this book is no mere rehash of his previous memoir, *Tornado Down*. He has used his extensive knowledge and contacts to create a well-rounded record of the Tornado strike force (the fighter variant takes a back seat) during the Gulf War. He picks 15-20 Tornado crews and follows their training, deployment and operations as they went to war, bringing the experience of flying and fighting the aircraft to life in a dramatic but expert fashion. He does not limit himself to the flying, either, following the experiences of those (like himself) who suffered as prisoners of war, and also the agonies suffered by the families who were left behind. Nichols combines a professional eye for the technicalities with the human stories to create a readable and informative work, and a fitting tribute to those who did not come home. **SH**

The tactics used in Iraq by RAF warplanes such as the Tornado remain the subject of much controversy

© Alamy

EAVESDROPPING ON THE EMPEROR

BRITAIN FOUGHT A LINGUISTIC AS WELL AS AN ARMED CONFLICT WITH JAPAN IN WORLD WAR II, ONE THAT REQUIRED BRITISH CODEBREAKERS AND INTERROGATORS TO DEAL WITH THE ENEMY IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE

Author: Peter Kornicki **Publisher:** Hurst **Price:** £25 **Released:** Out now

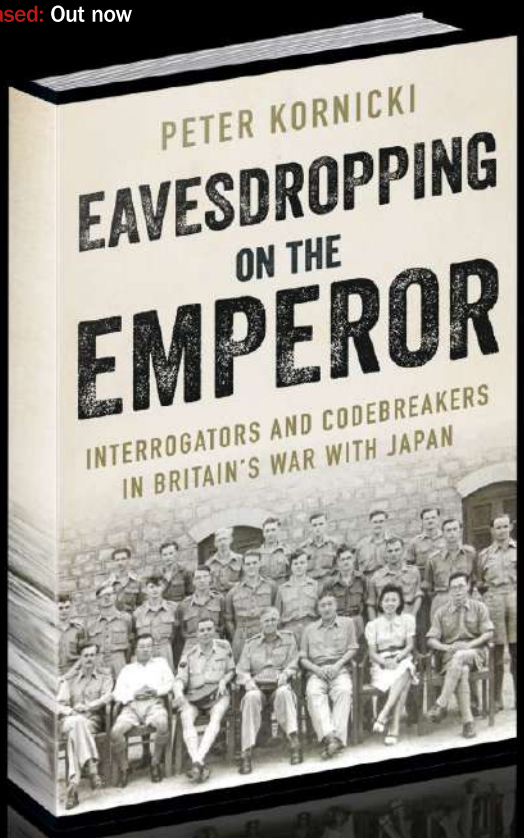
There was an enormous linguistic disparity to overcome in the Pacific War with Japan. English as a second language is spoken in numerous countries throughout world, hence the British have traditionally displayed a notorious laziness when it comes to learning foreign tongues. The country's principal European enemies in the Second World War spoke German and Italian. This did not present a great problem for codebreakers and interrogators, many of whom possessed a knowledge of these languages which, after all, share Indo-European roots. But the picture changed radically when Britain found itself at war with Japan in December 1941.

"There can be no doubt that Britain was ill-prepared for war with Japan," says Peter Kornicki, who brings to this book his credentials as British Japanologist and Emeritus Professor of Japanese at Cambridge University. "Despite many warnings from experts in universities and the diplomatic service, the War Office made no attempt to introduce training in the Japanese language until after the outbreak of war."

What the author asks, with justification, is what use were captured Japanese documents if nobody could read them? Likewise, what value were prisoners of war if nobody could interrogate them? What was the point of decoding wireless messages if nobody could translate the decrypts? For Japan, therefore, being in possession of a baffling language was seen as a natural weapon for confounding the enemy.

Intelligence officers take a back seat in the vast outpouring of literature on the war, which mostly concerns itself with campaigns, armaments, generals and frontline troops. Kornicki has sought to address this imbalance with a scholarly yet highly accessible account of British linguists and their roles in the war. Britain's response to this challenge was Bedford House, set up in January 1942 to recruit candidates for training in Japanese. This was the brainchild of Brigadier John Tiltman, who worked at the Government Code and Cypher School. Those elite young graduates selected had little idea of why they were being interviewed, much less why they were required to sign the Official Secrets Act. Four months or so later, the students on the first course had made astounding progress. Many were taken on at Bletchley Park once they had completed their course.

So effective was the Bedford Japanese School crash course that similar training programmes were put in place in five other Allied countries. As a result, thousands of men and women acquired a sufficient knowledge of Japanese to be dependably employed as translators, interpreters and interrogators. Kornicki poses the question of whether Japanese intelligence ever realised their language was not the natural code that had been assumed. The probable answer is that they had little if any idea this presumed impenetrable wall had been breached, and there is no clear sign that measures were taken to safeguard Japanese communications. One can therefore imagine the surprise when in the post-war occupation of Japan, large numbers of Allied Japanese-speakers arrived in the country. That was when the Japanese became aware of the existence of training courses overseas and how successful these programmes had proved to be. **JS**

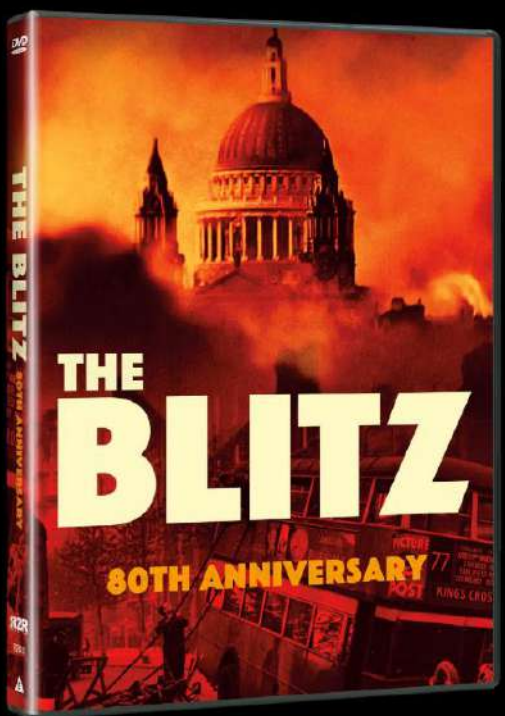


"KORNICKI POSES THE QUESTION OF WHETHER JAPANESE INTELLIGENCE EVER REALISED THEIR LANGUAGE WAS NOT THE NATURAL CODE THEY HAD BEEN ASSUMED"

THE BLITZ 80TH ANNIVERSARY

EIGHT DECADES ON FROM ONE OF THE DARKEST CHAPTERS IN BRITAIN'S HISTORY, THIS INFORMATIVE DOCUMENTARY IS A POIGNANT REMINDER OF A NATION'S SUFFERING AND RESOLVE TO FIGHT ON

Studio: **Reel2Reel Films** Director: **Bruce Vigar**
Released: **Out now**



"THIS FAMOUS 'BLITZ SPIRIT' BEAMS OFF THE SCREEN AS FORMER RAF PILOTS, GROUNDCREW AND CITY DWELLERS RECALL THE DETERMINATION OF THE BRITISH PEOPLE THROUGHOUT 1940 AND BEYOND"

After 80 years of study, remembrance and reflection, the torment and terror of the Blitz has been covered in books and films in great detail, a history of Nazi Germany's aerial assault on a stubborn Britain etched into the annals of World War II. Therefore it's hard not to be impressed by the efforts of the producers and researchers behind this anniversary documentary in uncovering previously unseen footage and photographs that cast a new light on a time of seemingly unrelenting darkness.

While the appropriately staid narration and flow of facts cover the most well-known aspects of the Blitz, the engines that get this documentary airborne are the people who actually experienced the bombings first-hand. Unvarnished accounts of sleeping in flooded Anderson shelters, becoming trapped in bomb-ravaged houses and pursuing enemy bombers through a pitch-black sky take what would otherwise be an educational but unremarkable addition to the history of the Blitz and elevate it to new heights. It injects an almost tangible sense of danger and at times despair as witnesses recount their lives beneath the bombs.

Beginning on 7 September 1940, a day that would become known as Black Saturday, the Blitz saw a frustrated Luftwaffe turning its attention to the cities of Britain having failed to defeat the RAF in the Battle of Britain, a struggle for dominance of the skies, without which Germany could not hope to launch a successful invasion.

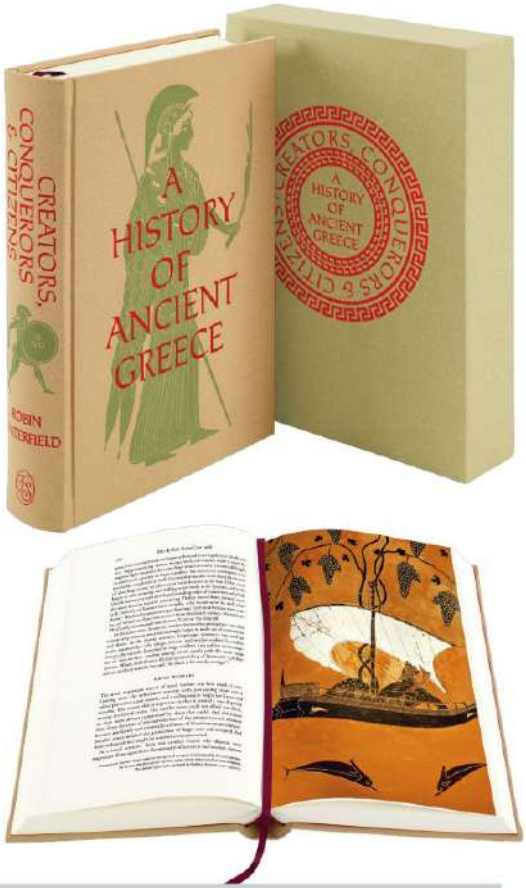
For 56 days London shook beneath a merciless bombardment as the Nazi regime sought to bomb Britain into submission in the initial stages of the campaign. Many other cities also found themselves targeted, including Coventry. Such was the damage inflicted upon it by German bombers that the city would lend its name to a new word, to 'coventrate' (meaning to devastate by bombing),

The Blitz would ultimately claim 43,000 lives, reduce approximately 250,000 homes to rubble and make over 1 million people homeless. Yet, despite the widespread carnage, in the words of one interviewee: "There was a strange spirit about. People accepted it was dangerous. You just thought nothing of it."

This famous 'Blitz Spirit' beams off the screen as former RAF pilots, groundcrew and city dwellers recall the determination of the British people throughout 1940 and beyond. Coupled with moving footage of Londoners sleeping on Underground platforms and rescue workers picking through the ruins of obliterated buildings, these testimonies make for a stirring tale of triumph in the face of an enemy hellbent on razing Britain to the ground.

Gripping scenes of daytime dogfights and shots taken from inside the cramped confines of various cockpits serve as vivid reminders of just how vicious the fight for Britain became. It was a conflict that took a sinister turn when the Luftwaffe switched to largely nighttime bombing raids, a move that exposed Britain's weak defences. The threat facing the nation is succinctly encapsulated by a former squadron leader, who stated when interviewed that: "Everybody knew if we didn't hold off the Germans, and the German army landed, we were finished." It was a life or death struggle that this thought-provoking documentary explores in a manner befitting those who lived to tell their tales: calm, collected and not without a hint of pride. **CG**

CREATORS, CONQUERORS & CITIZENS



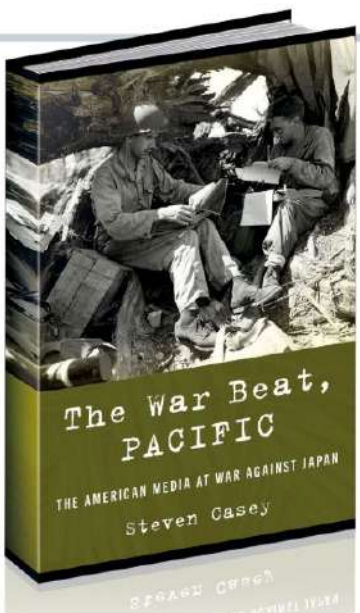
THIS NEW FOLIO EDITION IS PACKED WITH STUNNING ILLUSTRATIONS

Author: Robin Waterfield **Publisher:** Folio Society
Price: £69.95 **Released:** Out now

Originally released in 2020, classics scholar and translator Robin Waterfield's book is a fantastic introduction to the topic of Ancient Greece, which manages to strike a canny balance between the big names of the era with the daily lives of ordinary Greeks. Now presented in his Folio edition, we have a package that complements the quality of the writing rather nicely.

Waterfield's extensive research and smart structuring of this book makes it an excellent way to look at Ancient Greek history from a new perspective. Broken down into the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic Periods, examining and explaining the evidence available, Waterfield paints a vivid picture of the rise and decline of Greece as an ancient power. And all of this is ably assisted by maps and other illustrative images embedded throughout.

Those illustrations are now expanded and supplemented by this Folio edition, which includes 32 pages of colour imagery. As always with a Folio edition, the quality of these images is second to none, both informative and beautifully presented throughout the book to complement the material. They include images of statues, reliefs, coins, vases and more, all adding greater depth to the book. There really is no better way to experience reading what was already a fine piece of work on ancient history. **JG**



THE WAR BEAT, PACIFIC

THE AMERICAN MEDIA AT WAR AGAINST JAPAN

AN IN-DEPTH STUDY OF HOW THE HORRORS OF THE PACIFIC WAR WERE REPORTED

Author: Steven Casey **Publisher:** Oxford University Press **Price:** £26.99

We approached this book with anticipation. It's years since we read Robert Leckie's *Helmet for my Pillow* and Eugene Sledge's *With the Old Breed*, both classic first-hand accounts of the conflict in the Pacific. We were also reminded of Richard Collier's *The Warcos: The War Correspondents of World War Two*. Casey's latest study is a welcome follow-up to his *The War Beat, Europe*. Interestingly, he highlights that for the first three years of the war the US media was far more fascinated by events in Europe than in Asia.

Indeed, once American troops set foot in North Africa, the fighting in New Guinea became all but neglected by comparison. Only Midway helped to peak interest. However, D-Day ensured that American sacrifice in the Pacific remained relatively ignored. This was also in part as a result of the struggles with General MacArthur over the thorny issue of press censorship.

Casey seeks to redress this neglect by providing a very personal account through the eyes of a brave band of war reporters (including Ernie Pyle) from America's defeat in the Philippines to its bloody triumph on Okinawa. To get their stories these men regularly put themselves in harm's way, and 23 reporters were killed in the Pacific. This is a solidly researched work and a pleasure to read. Brimming with anecdotes, it sheds light on just what it takes to be a war correspondent. For those seeking new perspectives on America's war with Japan this is a thoroughly illuminating book. **ATJ**

DODGE THE BOMBS AND DISCOVER THE HISTORY OF BRITAIN'S DARKEST HOUR

Step back to the summer of 1940 and immerse yourself in the brutal struggle waged between Nazi Germany's Luftwaffe and the people of Britain, a battle that helped to shape the outcome of World War II

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YOROI ARMOUR

The yoroi is the only example of 14th century Japanese armour exhibited in the United States, and there are only a handful left in the world

© Metropolitan Museum of Art

This imposing but elaborate piece of Japanese samurai armour dates from the 14th century and was personally linked to the first shogun of the Ashikaga shogunate

During the Middle Ages, Japanese samurai warriors wore yoroi armour. The term 'ö-yoroi' means 'great armour' and it was made from pieces of lacquered metal that were connected with silk laces and cords. The breastplate was wrapped around the body and closed by a separate panel on the right side as well as a deep, four-sided skirt. Yoroi armour first appeared during the 10th century and was in favour for several centuries afterwards. It was generally worn by warriors on horseback and reserved for high-ranking samurai. The armour became outdated by the 15th century when the samurai transferred from cavalry to primarily infantry tactics.

The yoroi pictured here is laced in white silk and has diagonal bands of multi-coloured lacings at the edge of the skirt and shoulder guards. These lacings were representations of the rainbow, which signified good fortune and momentary beauty in Japanese culture. There is also symbolism in the breastplate, which has a stencilled leather image of Fudö Myöö, a wrathful Buddhist deity. Fudö Myöö's fierce appearance but calm inner strength were highly prized attributes for the samurai. The armour is also decorated with copper gilt, particularly on the elaborate headpiece.

The yoroi was reputedly donated to a shrine near Kyoto called the Shinomura Hachimangü. Its donor is traditionally believed to be Ashikaga Takauji (1305-58), the founder of the Ashikaga shogunate. The shoguns were military dictators of Japan but Takauji was said to be an enlightened ruler. His contemporary, collaborator and Zen master Musö Soseki described him as being fearless, cool in battle, generous, merciful and tolerant. Takauji was appointed as shogun in 1338, with the Ashikaga shogunate lasting until 1573.

The yoroi armour is part of the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Known as The Met, the museum is the largest art museum in the United States and contains the popular Department of Arms and Armor.

THE MET

www.metmuseum.org

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Coastal Gun Battles

BY MID 1942 great swathes of Asia and the Pacific came under the conquest of Japan and its Imperial Army and Navy.

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Some of the most useful were the *'Coastal Guns'* that had once been part of massive artillery batteries defending *Singapore* at the southern tip of British Malaya and *Saigon* and *Haiphong* in French Indochina.

To help defend their newly-won empire the Japanese dismantled and relocated many of these coastal guns onto captured Pacific islands that were to form a defensive chain against the inevitable American counter offensive that was already on the way.

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All of these figures and the gun itself play their part in continuing to tell the dramtic story of the war in the Pacific during WW2.

GUN & GUNNERS

Among the most useful of these coastal artillery pieces were the formerly-*French 155mm guns* that had once protected the sea approaches to both *Saigon* and *Haiphong.*

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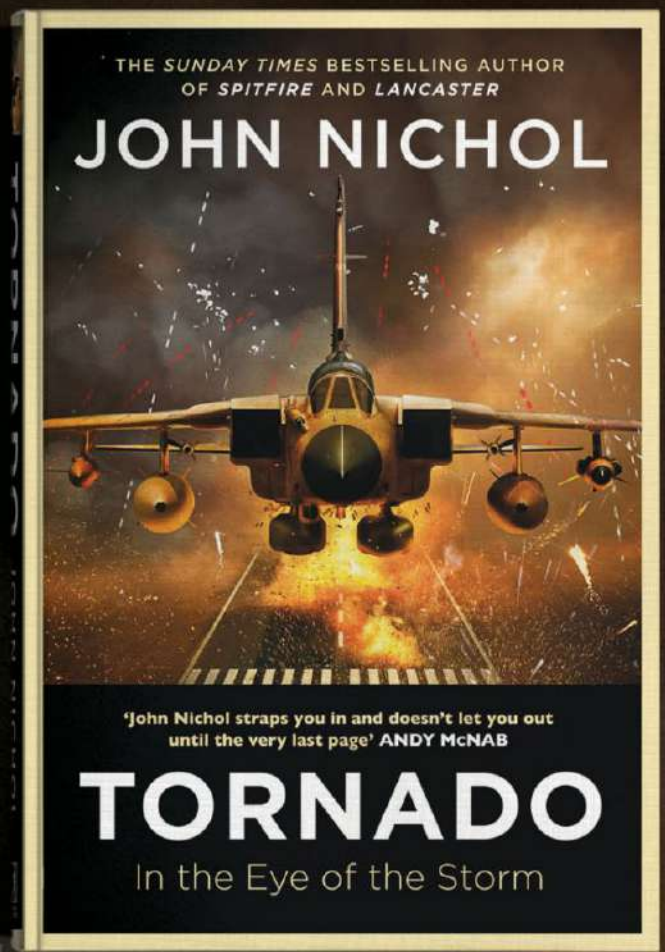
The story of the RAF's Tornado force during the 1991 Gulf War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